The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral Project

AMBASSADOR HAROLD W. GEISEL

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: June 30, 2006

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INTERVIEW

Q: This is tape one, side one with Harold Geisel. G-E-I-S-E-L.

GEISEL: Correct.

Q: Middle initial?

GEISEL: W.

Q: W. And you go by Harry?

GEISEL: I go by Harry.

Q: Okay. Well, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

GEISEL: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, on May 11, 1947.

Q: Okay. Let's talk a bit about the Geisel family. Let's do the father's side first. Where do you know they came from?

GEISEL: Oh, I know exactly where they came from. They came from the Rhineland of Germany. And my dad came to America as did the rest of his family as a result of the Nazi persecution because we were all Jewish. And that would have been in the late 1930s.

Q: What do you know about your father's family in Germany? What were they involved in and doing?

GEISEL: They were, primarily it was a very Jewish thing; they were butchers and cattle dealers. Or I should say both, you generally did both. My father was the first person in his family to finish gymnasium, let alone go to university, which he did, and he graduated as a lawyer.

Q: Where in the Rhineland?

GEISEL: The town was called Rheinbach, which is very close to Bonn.

Q: Ah ha. Then why Chicago?

GEISEL: Actually he started in New York, and he started in New York of course because that's where people found him a job, that is, connections. Just before he left Germany he worked for a Baron Von Hirsch, who was I guess Jewish but lived in Switzerland, was fabulously rich, in fact left a very famous art collection, and he was recommended to a leather company in New York. But then after a year or two, I think a year, he moved to Chicago. Again, there was a German-Jewish connection, and he worked for some people named Adler in Chicago.

Q: Now on your mother's side, where do they come from?

GEISEL: They all came from near Heidelberg, a little town called Mosbach. And what's interesting is she actually did a very extensive family tree. You know, Germans are into that sort of thing.

Q: Oh yes, whoa.

GEISEL: And she got her family all the way back to, I think it was 1493. And they all came from that area and they all were Jewish and they all were also small dealers of one thing or another.

Q: Now, did your mother, I mean her family, did they come, were they merchants or were they-

GEISEL: They were all merchants. Jews really couldn't go into the professions in the old days in Germany.

Q: Medicine maybe at the beginning.

GEISEL: Exactly. A little bit of medicine, a little bit of law. And you know, the rich ones were bankers. I think she may have had a distant relative who was a banker but, by and large, they were merchants of one kind or another, some more successful than others.

Q: What sort of schooling did she have?

GEISEL: She, I believe, had to leave the Gymnasium at 16 because of the Nazi time. She stayed as long as she could. In fact, she's still very bitter, and she has done tapes, because it was very, very hard at the end, and the principal quietly said to her, "try and stay as long as you can, you won't regret getting the education." I guess she left when she was 16 and then she went to a Jewish household school in Frankfurt for a bit and wandered around just waiting for her American visa to come through.

Q: Do you know how the American visa came through?

GEISEL: Well, it came through the Consulate in Stuttgart for both of them, although they didn't know each other, of course. And in both cases it was as a result of being sponsored by people in America that they didn't know at all. I don't remember, oh, I do know who sponsored my father. It was Uncle Charlie. He came from Chicago, lived in the Sherman House Hotel, was actually quite a well to do man and he sponsored a number of people. I actually met him. My mother was sponsored by some sort of farmer in Missouri who she never met as far as I know.

Q: How did your mother and father meet?

GEISEL: Not a bad story. My father actually had met her father once when he was working for his father briefly. The parents were in London waiting to be able to go to the United States. Both sets of parents met. My father's brother was also in London. My mother's parents heard that he was going to America, to Chicago, and they asked if he could bring a pair of alligator shoes to my mother. My father's brother was a shy guy and he asked my father to do that and that was the story. And apparently my father said to my mother, they got on well at the first date, "I'm not the marrying type," and my mother decided he was.

Q: Well that shows where power lies.

GEISEL: Indeed, indeed.

Q: Well in your family, how Jewish was it?

GEISEL: You know, I think they had a lot of background on my mother's side and they were observant but not to the point that anything really was fanatic. I would just call them observant. They came from a small town so they didn't even know what the Reform movement was. And they certainly didn't follow any of the big commandments on the Sabbath about don't do this and don't do that. On my mother's side, her mother was fanatic from the day she was born to the day she died. So fanatic that, if she had a cold, she wouldn't put a handkerchief in her pocket on the Sabbath because that would be carrying something; she would pin it to her dress so it was part of her clothing. My mother totally revolted against that and had no time for it at all. She was still like my father, traditional, but no time for the fanatic stuff and they certainly wouldn't hesitate to drive a car on the Sabbath. They went to the synagogue more out of a social thing than out of a religious thing.

Q: Well now, did you get much, I assume that the Holocaust must have hit the family?

GEISEL: Well you know, it didn't hit most German Jews that hard. That was the irony of it all. Most German Jews saw Hitler firsthand. It wasn't like the poor Russian and Polish Jews who lived with governments that were against the Nazis and didn't know it would come there. It hit my mother's side quite hard though. My mother's brother perished in Bergen-Belsen because he only got as far as Holland before the war started. She lost aunts and uncles and cousins. Again, mostly people who could have gotten out but who didn't move fast enough or who, the older ones, the aunts and uncles, just thought they were too old. Or one, for instance, had been injured as a combatant in the First World War so he thought he would be safe and that sort of thing. My father lost only distant relatives; no one that he was close to at all. Once in a while I would ask him and he would say oh, yes, that cousin or something like that, so that their different attitudes towards Germany was tempered by their experiences, of course.

Q: In Chicago, and Chicago of course has a large German population there.

GEISEL: Indeed.

Q: As a matter of fact, I was born in Chicago and my mother-

GEISEL: On the north side, I suppose.

Q: Oh yes.

GEISEL: Yes. We were the south side.

Q: _____ came from my grandfather was a German American lawyer and he had German clientele. And they spoke German at home. What was home life and all like?

GEISEL: My parents, much to their sorrow and mine, especially my mother, hated Germany much too much to speak German at the time. Because remember, I was born in 1947, it was too soon after the War. My mother had found out that her brother died, I think, in 1946, so she just didn't want German spoken in the house. Now, of course, all of us are sorry; it would have been a wonderful opportunity. And many of their friends did speak German to their children. When they were younger I would say that most of their friends, the majority, maybe not most but, the majority of their friends were fellow German Jewish refugees, all of whom came with absolutely nothing and all of whom did very well. As they got older, obviously their circle of friends widened enormously, not only Jews but Gentiles to the point now where I would say my mother probably has more Gentile friends than Jewish friends.

Q: Well now, you lived on the south side?

GEISEL: That's right.

Q: This was at this time, this was sort of the Leopold-Loeb, Bobby Franks?

GEISEL: Oh no, no, no, no. You're about two decades too early.

Q: Oh I realize that but I mean, it was in the area, wasn't it?

GEISEL: They were more in what was called Kenwood-Hyde Park. I grew up in a neighborhood, although my first few years were in Hyde Park, called South Shore, which was a little farther south, not as wealthy, well no, comparably wealthy I guess. But that area in turn ultimately became Black. We stayed. In fact, I was one of the few people from my grammar school that went to my high school, which was 88 percent Black. It was a grand old high school, Hyde Park High, which had such alumni as Amelia Earhart, Steve Allen, Benny Goodman and, even in my day, it was ranked by some academic organization as being number 17 in the nation for having the most students who went on to PhDs. We were always amused because Hyde Park High, of course, took care of South Shore but also especially Hyde Park, including the University of Chicago area, which had its own laboratory school, and we used to joke that the assistant professors and associate professors sent their kids to the lab school but, the professors sent their kids to Hyde Park

High. So we had this vast majority of very underprivileged kids with a sprinkling of very, very, very sharp kids who went on to the likes of all the Ivy League schools.

Q: Well now, back again to the family, do you have brothers, sisters?

GEISEL: I have a brother who's four years younger and who is a journalist.

Q: Now, what was home life like?

GEISEL: Home life was, I'd say very '50s, very Leave it to Beaverish, albeit without suburbia. Doors left open, total Age of Innocence, walking around the neighborhood and going to Rosenblum's drug store to get a Green River. The neighborhood was-

Q: A green river was a syrup that made a- you put it with carbonated water-

GEISEL: Right.

Q: It made a kind of wonderful dispenser that-

GEISEL: Exactly, exactly. Well, the neighborhood itself was, I would say, 50 percent Jewish and 50 percent Irish Catholic. And the Jews all went to O'Keefe Elementary School and then Hyde Park High or South Shore High, depending on what side of the Illinois Central Tracks you were. The Catholic kids, unfortunately for them from our point of view, went to St. Phillip Neri because, of course, the nuns didn't hesitate to box ears and rap knuckles with rulers.

Q: Yes. Well, did-

GEISEL: This was then followed by the brothers at Mt. Carmel who beat the crap out of "bad boys."

Q: Well how did they mix? Often Irish Catholic and Jewish kids, you know, would pick up the worst of the prejudices of the parents or something.

GEISEL: I think there was some conflict but not much. I remember my father used to have this thing; he used to say, "Ah, Chicago. It's a wonderful town. The Jews own it, the Irish run it and the Schwartzes enjoy it."

Q: Well, were you much of a reader?

GEISEL: I was a tremendous reader. I took great pride in having read every American history book in the South Shore Public Library by the time I was, oh, in my mid-teens.

Q: Can you think of any books in particular that you enjoyed?

GEISEL: Oh yes. I used to get hooked by series, so I did the whole Alexander Dumas, Three Musketeers, of which The Three Musketeers are only the start. And then I did the same thing with Victor Hugo. Oh, too far back for me to remember more but my nose was always in a book.

Q: Yes. Did you get involved in some of the, you know, I think of Kenneth Roberts?

GEISEL: No.

Q: American history ones-

GEISEL: Not so much in terms of novels, I mean, other than Gone With the Wind, of course, which I must have read five times.

Q: Well then, at school, what subjects turned you on and didn't turn you on?

GEISEL: The only subject that really turned me on, turned me on massively, was American history and government, which I was absolutely wild about. I hated math, I hated science, I barely tolerated English, I liked economics. But I was so much into extracurricular activities that schoolwork was not important to me unless I liked it.

Q: What were your extracurricular activities?

GEISEL: I was big in student government. Notwithstanding the fact that it was an 88 percent Black high school I was president of the student council and had worked my way up to that. I was on the yearbook; I was in the honor society when I managed to have decent grades. My grades were extremely mediocre, by and large, except in things I liked.

Q: By the way, back sort of at home, did you get bar mitzvahed and all of that?

GEISEL: Oh yes, yes, I did and my brother did. Again, it wasn't a huge deal but it was something that I and all of my friends did. I went through a stage when I was, I guess, just became bar mitzvahed and for a year or two afterwards where I was very interested in things Jewish and then that interest died down. And we were always observant of the holidays but again it was more of a traditional thing than a religious thing.

Q: What activity was your father doing then?

GEISEL: My dad, after he graduated from law school, was unable to practice law because of the Nazis. He took the bar exam and he passed it but was not allowed to take an oath of allegiance to Hitler. In those days you had to first serve the state as a civil servant for I think it was the first three or six years after you graduated as an assistant state's attorney or as a defense counsel or as a clerk in a State law office.

Q: This is in Germany?

GEISEL: In Germany. That's how he got his job in America because he worked as an unofficial law clerk for one of Barn Von Hirsch's tanneries in Offenbach and then went to America in the hide business and of course had no money to study law. So he stayed in the hide business, hides and skins. He started out in as awful a job as you can imagine, going in the boxcars and cutting off horsetails and inspecting cowhides and that sort of thing but, you know, that's what you did in the Depression. He stayed with his firm forever but eventually, of course, moved in the office and ultimately was running the firm when the bosses died and then he took over the firm; he bought it out from the heirs.

Q: Was the Depression something that you all lived with, I mean, the residue of this?

GEISEL: Oh, in terms of my parents' attitude, yes. They were not well to do. I would describe them as very middle class but they always lived as if they were just on the edge. They were always into saving and never showing off and being more modest than they could. They ultimately became rich but it- well, let's not say rich, let's say very well off. Their consumption was very low key and, as kids, we were very much aware of the value of a dollar. We were given very meager allowances and we were expected to help around the house and we were often told about how hard things were. My mother had started working in factories when she came to America. She packed Baby Ruth candy bars and ice cream cones and that sort of thing.

Q: Well did you, during the summers, have summer jobs?

GEISEL: Oh sure. Well, only when I graduated from high school and went to college, of course. As a youngster, I would go on the beach with my wagon and pick up all the empty bottles for the deposit, much to my parents' applause. They were very serious about the value of money. They were also, to give them the due they deserve, always very, very charitable people and they impressed on us the importance of helping those who had less than we had.

Q: Was there any connection with Germany after the war while you were a kid? I mean, did you-

GEISEL: Well, my mother was in touch with her family's old maid and would send her packages of old clothing at first. My father maintained some friendships. My father had not suffered the way my mother had. He was basically done with school when the Nazis came and his town, at least as far as he could remember, was really quite decent. He said there were a few Nazis but they were thugs and no one liked them very much. My mother, of course, approached it very differently. So my father did stay in touch with a few of his old friends from Rheinbach. And, of course, my father ultimately got a pension as a retired judge. You know, they sort of projected what his career would have been and, when he was old enough, they said well, as restitution you get this pension.

Q: Did your family travel around America or anything?

GEISEL: Oh yes. Very much so. Colorado was very popular. Canada. When they had less money I can remember as a very young kid going to, what was it called, Baraboo, Devil's Lake in Wisconsin, nearby. We visited relatives that we had in Cincinnati. We visited my grandmother in New York City; I went on my own even, much to the, I think, amazement and secret delight of my mother. I think I must have been about 16, I just went and took money out of the bank account, bought a train ticket and announced I was going to New York.

Q: Well then, at high school, was there much mixture with the Blacks there?

GEISEL: Yes and no. I would say there was very much of a mixture with the Blacks in terms of the Blacks in our class. I don't mean economic class. I mean we had, at our high school, a six track educational system. It started off with double honors, let's see, it was double honors, regular, remedial, essential and educable mentally handicapped, for which you only qualified if you had an IQ below 70.

Q: Talk about labeling.

GEISEL: Yes, yes. Well, that's right. Now, of course, those classes didn't apply in things like art and gym and whatnot. But with the group of friends, well, people who were in our class, we totally mixed. Remember that I was really one of the exceptions coming from South Shore, there were a few others; most of them came from Hyde Park, many of them the University of Chicago. So you had a very liberal outlook on the part of the Whites by and large and it was just assumed that you would, you know, you would mix with everyone. I remember some of the kids very well and they came to our house and there was, or our apartment, I should say, it was no big deal at all.

Q: How about dating? I mean, I'm not talking about just between groups but, I mean, was there much dating? What was the-?

GEISEL: Interracial? Well, there wasn't much dating period, if you will. I can't think of any serious interracial dating. There was certainly very casual in the sense, you know, you'd go out with somebody who was Black but probably in a group but there wasn't much serious dating period.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: But we would have remarked upon if, let's say, a White guy and a Black girl were going out no differently than if any kids were going out together. And of course we didn't say Black in those days, either. Let me see, what did we used to say?

Q: Colored? Negro?

GEISEL: I think Colored was being replaced by Negro. If you called somebody Black they'd more than likely say, I'm not Black, you know." That came later.

Q: Well, the definition today, the definition's African American and it's been a slipping-

GEISEL: Yes. I happen to think African American's a reasonable label. Yes.

Q: What about, given your father and mother's background, I assume it was assumed that you were going to go to college?

GEISEL: Oh, very much so. They started saving when I was born- $100 a year, which actually, by the time I went to college, was enough to pay the tuition for one year.

Q: Well what were you pointed towards?

GEISEL: They always assumed that I would be a lawyer like my dad. But I wouldn't say that I was pointed towards anything.

Q: When did you, you graduated from-

GEISEL: I graduated from Hyde Park High a year early, when I was 17, because I had skipped a semester in grammar school and then went two summers to summer school in high school and that was enough to move me up the full year.

Q: So what year did you graduate?

GEISEL: I graduated in 1964.

Q: Where, in your family, politically where did they stand?

GEISEL: My mother was always an absolute liberal Democrat from the experience with Franklin Roosevelt. My father was much more eclectic. I know that, in 1948 he voted for Norman Thomas, the Socialist. On the other hand he voted for plenty of Republicans in local politics so I would say he was a liberal but less liberal than my mother and you never could be sure about what he was going to do.

Q: How about locally, the Daley regime and all that?

GEISEL: Oh, we loved it.

Q: How did your family react to this?

GEISEL: Oh, we loved it. My father not as much but I remember arguing with him, you know, he would say Daley was too conservative about something and I'd say look, we vote for him to pick up the garbage, not to talk. So I liked Dick Daley a lot and the Daley machine and I even think, yes, my last two years in high school I worked for the Seventh Ward Regular Democratic Organization. By that time our neighborhood, I would say, was at least 50 percent Black and the Regular Democratic Organization had not kept up

with that very well and I was happy to go to Black homes and pass out the propaganda and all the rest.

Q: I'm not sure whether it was Hyde Park but, you know, there were battles in those neighborhoods over, I guess they called it blockbusting or whatever it is.

GEISEL: Not in Hyde Park. Hyde Park was very smooth. In South Shore there were problems, although they tended to be much further south, where the steel mills were. We didn't have any battles in our neighborhood. Gradually the Blacks came and gradually the Jews fled, with the Irish behind them.

Q: Yes. Well, '64 you graduated from high school. Where'd you go?

GEISEL: I went to Johns Hopkins.

Q: And why Johns Hopkins?

GEISEL: Well, that was easy. It was actually the only school I applied to, I went there on early decision, and my grades were really not good enough for Hopkins but I think they took one look at my background and they thought," we want him". And my SATs were probably above average. I went to Johns Hopkins because I was also president of our temple youth group and we had an advisor who was an assistant professor at Northwestern and I was thinking about Brown and he said go to Johns Hopkins because it's a small, true university. You'll have all the resources of a university but it's still small enough to care about you as an undergraduate. And in those days there were only 1,500 undergraduates and 1,500 graduates.

Now, there were two problems for me when I got there. Number one, once again, I didn't give a damn about anything except what I was interested in. And number two, Johns Hopkins, it turned out, was absolutely notorious for totally ignoring its undergraduates unless they were interested in going on to teach in the arts and sciences. And I remember, just the other day I was telling my daughter, who's starting college in the fall, my younger daughter, that the only time I ever met my advisor was when he told me that I was on academic probation and I was going to get kicked out unless I did better. Now, that's the only time I met the advisor they assigned me. Ultimately my final advisor was the chairman of the history department and we got along wonderfully.

Q: Well then, I mean, how did Johns Hopkins hit you when you got there?

GEISEL: Oh, like a ton of bricks. I didn't know how to study. I was overwhelmed by the competition and I believe my grades were, I think, a B a C and two Ds because, by then, I had dropped the fifth course. Oh, and an A in ROTC.

Q: Yes. Well, what were the, I mean, Johns Hopkins, how did you one, deal with the sciences and all that?

GEISEL: Well you see, there was an out for the handful of people who were not interested in science. There were 400 in our class, of which 100 were pre-meds, 100 were other science, physical sciences they called it, 100 were engineers and 100 were the arts and sciences but we guessed that about 50 of them were what we called "secret pre-meds" who couldn't get in as premeds. They had biology for non-science majors and I forgot what the other science course that we could take was.

Q: They had something they called the history and method of science.

GEISEL: Exactly.

Q: It was designed for students like myself who couldn't hack the-

GEISEL: Well, that was the same thing for us. And actually, I thoroughly enjoyed biology for non-science majors, much to my amazement.

Q: Well then, did you pick up anything, did you go the full four years?

GEISEL: Oh yes.

Q: Did you pick up anything about Baltimore itself?

GEISEL: Oh yes, I loved Baltimore. That was a great, great town. I loved the restaurants. I didn't think much of the Orioles. I guess they probably weren't winning too much in those days. I hung around a lot of neighborhood;, rented an apartment one year. I worked for the First National Bank of Maryland. I also worked for an urban and economic consulting company. So I knew the city pretty well.

Q: Yes. I was wondering did you get involved, you know, because it has a rather vibrant Jewish area.

GEISEL: Very little, very little. It does. By the time I was there, there was really nothing much Jewish left in the city but in the suburbs we had Pikesville. I dated one girl who went to Goucher whose dad was a doctor in Pikesville. It wasn't a matter of either shunning a Jewish area or embracing it, it was just a matter, if it was there I did but, I felt no particular motivation to go out of my way.

Q: Your mother wasn't on you to marry a nice Jewish girl?

GEISEL: Oh, very much so but she didn't care when I did it or how I met her.

Q: Just so long as you did.

GEISEL: Just so long as I did it.

Q: Did you get any feel for Washington politics there?

GEISEL: Well sure. But again, I wouldn't describe myself as overly excited. Those were the days of LBJ and the Vietnam War and I was torn because I was in ROTC and I originally thought the Vietnam War was the right thing and gradually I had doubts. Although by the time I left Hopkins in '68 to go to grad school I was still thinking the Vietnam War was necessary but I wasn't very happy about it.

Q: Well then you went to grad school. Where'd you go?

GEISEL: I went to the University of Virginia Darden School. It wasn't called the Darden School in those days; to get an MBA. And the reason I did that is because my advisor was Alfred duPont Chandler, the chairman of the history department, a wonderful, wonderful person, who one day said to me, "your research isn't good enough that you could ever teach at Johns Hopkins. You should be a businessman". And I thought well- mind you, his specialty was business history and I'd done some work for him, and I thought well, he's going to write my recommendation so I'll do what he wants. And I applied to three schools, I applied to Harvard, where I was told I was too young, come try again later; University of Virginia and Northwestern. But Northwestern accepted me so quickly that it was sort of like the Groucho Marx thing about country clubs; you know, if they want me that badly, they can't be any good. Little did I know that they were so very good. And of course they accepted me quickly, I'm sure, because of the incredibly good recommendation that I got from Professor Chandler who was, arguably, the world's greatest business historian.

Q: Well then, University of Virginia. You were there from '68 to?

GEISEL: To '70.

Q: Okay, this is a very turbulent time.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Describe, in the first place, before we get into the social unrest or student unrest, how did you find the spirit and all as a grad student of the Virginia campus?

GEISEL: Really outsider looking in. We in the business school were very conservative, most of us still wore coats and ties. Virginia, I think relative to even the likes of Johns Hopkins but, certainly to the likes of more liberal schools was still conservative, however, by that time the ferment was rather fervent against the war, which was The Issue. It was, however, not the issue at the business school. I remember, when was it, wasn't it 1969 that they had the great Moratorium? I think so, where everyone stayed home? Well, it turned out that everyone at UVA stayed away on that day except for the business school where only six of us stayed away. But by that time I was one of the six, notwithstanding the fact that I was already a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. And I remember the dean calling us in and saying if it ever happened again he would throw us out and I had to bite my tongue to keep from laughing because I thought yeah, right,

throw us out and you'll get your building burned down. But fortunately it never came to that.

Q: Well, what was the business school like? How did you cotton to it?

GEISEL: I loved it. I loved it because, first of all, my professor was right. I had a natural affinity for business, I really did. It was like history for me and more so. Secondly, frankly, the competition wasn't anywhere near the Johns Hopkins level. It was good, there were good people but it was not Johns Hopkins.

Q: Well what was there about business? You know, there's business and business.

GEISEL: Oh yes. And I hated, for example, the QABDM, the quantitative approach to business decision making.

Q: Yes, I was wondering how this stood at that time.

GEISEL: But fortunately that course was the exception. Virginia, like Harvard, was what they call case study oriented. And it turned out I loved it. I loved taking decisions. I loved analyzing problems. My favorite was finance and I was one of the best students in finance, finance and investments. And we worked in groups and I really sort of dominated my group because I loved analyzing these sorts of things and I loved coming up with conclusions and it suited me to a T.

Q: Now did, given, you know, your future career, did diplomacy, foreign policy cross your radar much?

G: Well let me tell you how it happened. It wasn't a result of the so-called diplomat in residence who had just come back from being ambassador to Singapore, I guess one of the few career guys we had at that job. He once gave us a talk and all that he talked about was all the parties he had to go to and other types of events. But by then I had already taken the exam. Now why did I take the exam? That is amusing and I like getting that on the record. One day our finance professor came in- you got enough tape?

Q: Yes, go ahead, yes.

GEISEL: One day our finance professor came in, he said oh, most interesting thing happened yesterday. That day had been a school holiday. He said some guy came down from the U.S. Foreign Service and said that there were lots of opportunities for management people, they were desperate for management people and I thought they must be desperate because he hadn't even bothered to check that today was a school holiday. And he said here are some brochures. So I believe I and one other chap decided on a lark to take the exam. Well I was so impressed with that exam because it was a bear in those days. I don't know what it's like now but it sure was then. Wasn't it six, eight hours at least? And I thought, you know, I'm not sure if I passed that test. It so happened I did very well on it. But I thought, yes, I'd like to pursue this if I passed it. And then, of

course, I got the summons for the oral interview and I was also very impressed, having been lucky enough to get a decent panel.

Q: Well, do you recall any of the questions on the panel?

GEISEL: Yes. There were a lot of questions about management type situations. What would you do if? But there also was a sort of culture vulture thing; I think what they called general background on the exam. And I was very good on the culture vulture thing. And I remember them asking me what operas I liked and I said well, I tend to like French operas; that was before my Wagner days, and they said like what? And I said well, my favorite is Sampson and Delilah, of course I like Carmen. I stopped there and he said well, anything else by Bizet? And I said well of course Les Pecheurs de Perles. And he said oh, that's what I was fishing for. You know, a pun on the Pearl Fishers. And that's what has stuck in my mind, as you would expect. By the way, I have to add something interesting, two of the three people in that panel ended up working for me, much farther into the future.

Q: Well now, had you had much exposure or interest in foreign affairs prior to this?

GEISEL: Not overly, except in terms of history. I mean yes, I was a voracious newspaper reader but I had no overwhelming interest other than maybe Vietnam and then, of course, business. But, no, I didn't join the Foreign Service to be a diplomat; I joined the Foreign Service to be a manager.

Q: You graduated from business school in 1970. You'd had a commission. Which branch of the service were you in?

GEISEL: I was in the Army in the field artillery.

Q: What happened?

GEISEL: Well that's, again, an interesting story. Nobody wanted to hire me except for the Foreign Service. Well, no, one wonderful Baltimore bank did and I actually accepted a job from them because the Foreign Service took so damn long with the security clearance and then I got it and I went to the guy and told him I was screwing him. And God bless him, he said oh, don't feel so badly, I took the Foreign Service exam myself but I didn't pass it, so I understand. But I owed the Army two years. Now, the interesting thing was, if you had a student deferment, what they called 2S, you had to go into the service after you got your BA. But ROTC people were deferred to go on to graduate school. So I owed them two years. It was 1970. The Foreign Service said fine, when you have to go we'll put you on military furlough and you'll go. So I came in, went into the junior officer course assuming that in a few years, well in fact, my call up was actually March of '71, that I was due to attend officer basic at Fort Sill and then presumably go off as a forward observer in Vietnam, which was not a wonderful job, it was one of the jobs that did not have a long life expectancy. What happened though, and I remember as a junior officer we went off to an office in the Pentagon, what did they call it?

McNamara's Whiz Kids? It wasn't McNamara as SecDef since it was the Nixon administration but, it was all the computer guys. I talked to one of the guys and he said oh God, we'd love to have someone like you, you're a lieutenant, you have to go in? Let me check this out. And I was thrilled when a couple days later I got a letter that came from them until I opened it up and it said something like dear Lieutenant Geisel, we loved meeting you, we were so impressed but then we checked things out and there is such a desperate need for field artillery officers that we will not be able to break your assignment. I thought sure there's a need, they're all getting killed.

A few weeks later I actually had finished the junior officer course-

Q: We're talking about the Foreign Service junior officer?

GEISEL: Correct, correct. I think I'd finished it or was about to finish it and was about to go into the budget and fiscal course and it was a Saturday and I was in good old Arlington Towers, if you remember, now called I believe River Place, and it was when they still had the Vietnam Training Center there.

Q: In the garage.

GEISEL: Exactly. I was in that same building. I had an apartment there. And I get a call from the front desk, it's Saturday morning, there's a certified letter for you. And I said well sign for it. He said no, it's deliver to addressee only. And I thought to myself oh shit, who's suing me? And I go down and there it is from Fort Benjamin Harrison, the reserve component's administrative center and it was sent special delivery certified mail, the whole thing, and it said in effect dear Lieutenant Geisel, just a couple days ago President Nixon announced Vietnamization, it was not put in those terms but that's what it meant, and we now find we have too many officers in the field artillery. Would you be interested in 90 days active duty for training instead of two years? And I didn't even take my pajamas off, I put clothes over them and I ran up Wilson Boulevard, there used to be a post office farther up.

Q: There still is.

GEISEL: Well yes, but this one was farther up, it was called Roslyn Station, as is the current one, that's right. And I went to the clerk and I said is there anything faster than special delivery? And so ultimately I went in for only three months active duty for training and then went off as a junior officer to Brussels as a budget and fiscal officer.

Q: Tell me, when you got into your basic officer course-

GEISEL: At FSI?

Q: At FSI, how did both the course and your fellow students strike you?

GEISEL: Well the course struck me as a bunch of bullshit by and large, worthless, a lot of lectures, a few of which were useful. The students, some were terrific and are friends to this day. Some I thought were utterly hopeless. One of those guys actually went to jail. In fact, it was the guy who went to jail, visa selling in Santo Domingo, surprise, surprise, he had raised his hand, he had been a probation officer, we'd been there about, oh, a week or so, and he asked when are we going to have a chance to talk about our careers with the secretary of state? Well, you know, we hadn't been there quite long enough to all burst out laughing, but it was long enough that we thought this doesn't seem right.

Q: Did you have any, again you wanted to manage, did you have any, did you get any idea what this meant and where and that sort of thing?

GEISEL: No but I'll tell you a story which shows what an early manager I was. We had to go to, what was the place in West Virginia we all went to?

Q: By Berkeley Springs or something?

GEISEL: It wasn't Berkeley Springs but it was something of that genre where they had some type of federal guest house. And because we were supposedly such a special class with all these managers and all, that some of the Management big shots from State came as well for part of it and I only remember what was then called the deputy undersecretary for management, Bill Macomber, they actually called him Butts but we certainly didn't call him Butts, came and it must have been the assistant secretary for administration came and I forgot who else, and we had, of course, poker games, you know, where they joined us, and I insisted that a portion of each pot go towards the party that we were going to have when the class' assignments were announced. And of course I collected all the money and I cheated the more senior employees and we had a good hunk of money. So I actually had the party catered by Ridgewells. Thus, I started my Foreign Service management career early.

Q: When they came around and asked where do you want to go did you have any thoughts?

GEISEL: No, because remember, then I still thought that I was going into the Army.

Q: Oh yes. So you were a little bit loose on the whole thing.

GEISEL: Yes, very loose. Well, I probably would have said something like I prefer not to go to Vietnam. Because that's where I knew I was going with the Army.

Q: During the time at the University of Virginia you say you were getting more and more disillusioned about Vietnam but did you have any great feelings about Vietnam other than this-

GEISEL: Oh, I ended up being really against it. I thought what an appalling waste of American lives. That was my feeling. I never thought we were wrong to go in at the time

but ultimately I thought the cause was not at all worth what we had to put into it in terms of lives and treasure.

Q: Yes. So, as you-

GEISEL: This is more or less what I think about Iraq. I started by being enthusiastic, not very enthusiastic, I always had questions but I thought well, I understood where we were going to and now I don't think it's worth the lives and treasure that we're putting in to it.

Q: I couldn't agree with you more.

Where'd you go?

GEISEL: My first assignment was junior budget and fiscal officer in Brussels. Now you know in those days, you know very well in those days, an assignment in EUR was different, especially Western Europe. And would you believe I had to be interviewed by the EUR personnel person as a brand new junior officer before they would agree to the assignment? But I made a good impression and I went. And I made such an impression that after a year they moved me out of Brussels to take over the budget and fiscal officer job in Oslo where after a few months I was having the time of my life socially, shall we say, as a bachelor but, I said this is ridiculous, you don't need an American here, it's a waste. And I forgot about that, as I had a better and better and better and better and better time and sure enough, ultimately Joan Clark figured it out and after a single year I went back to be the assistant post management officer in EUR/EX. Except that just before I got there, Joan fired the post management officer so I was acting post management officer with all of really two years under my belt.

Q: That's a pretty responsible job, a very responsible job.

GEISEL: Oh, it was. In those days, I was an FSO-6, yes, I was a 6 in a 3 job. And this went on and on, month after month, and finally I just happened to notice in the traffic, which I wouldn't have normally seen, maybe I was duty officer or something, a thing where they were offering the post management job to someone else, an experienced admin officer who was an FSO-3 and he turned it down, I saw that too, and I went in to Joan's office on Monday and I said, I'd been there, I think about four months and I was killing myself. I would come in at 7:30-8 in the morning and I wouldn't leave until 10 at night. I'd have my lunch and my dinner brought to me, I would work from 8:00 to 4:00 on Saturday and I would work three, four hours on Sunday. And I was annoyed. And so I went in to Joan and I said Joan, are you happy with the job I'm doing? And she said we've never had anyone like it, it's wonderful. You know, I can't believe you're doing all this. I said fine, if you get me a boss, I quit. And Joan just smiled in her way of smiling and she said let me see what I can do. And of course they downgraded the job to an FSO-4 job and apparently a two-grade stretch was doable and then paneled me in to it. Then as soon as I left, Nick Baskey took the job from me and it went back to FSO-3.

Q: I want to go back.

GEISEL: Go.

Q: In the first place, how did you cotton to budget and fiscal work?

GEISEL: Oh, I was sort of a numbers guy. And I don't remember who I spoke with but one of my more senior officers who I spoke with, perhaps even at that card party, saw what I was interested in and whatnot and he said you know, you could really do well because everybody, all admin people hate budget and fiscal, they leave it to specialists, and you could really go places as an FSO if you were into it. And I said sure, why not? And I did. And he was right except after two years of it I never went back. But at least I was always in the position that no budget officer I ever had could pull the wool over my eyes.

Q: What was working in Brussels like at the time? You were there, this would be 19?

GEISEL: '71 to '72. Well, it was a mighty big place. The ambassador was John Eisenhower who was a lovely guy but we didn't see much of him.

Q: He had, you know, I've talked to people, he was, to put it mildly, disengaged.

GEISEL: Not only was he disengaged he was very unhappy there and he drank too much.

Q: Yes, I've heard that.

GEISEL: But he was a lovely, lovely nice person. His DCM, I can't think of a better word than to call him an asshole. His name was, well, I won't even say his name except we used to call him Luigi Di Roma. His first name was Lou. And he had been, I think he'd been DCM in Rome or, no, no, no he was economic counselor in Rome, I think. And I remember Eisenhower, I made the usual appointment to see him and he saw me and the DCM, it was put off I believe six times because he was so busy and that started my disdain for much political work because what the hell was going on at the bilateral mission to Belgium? I mean, give me a break. The only work that was being done in those days that was of significance was Embassy support for NATO and the Common Market in the admin section. And I mean, the place was full of political officers who were doing jack. I mean, you know, writing reports that no one ever read.

Q: Did you find yourself as an admin officer sort of the low man on the totem pole?

GEISEL: Oh definitely, definitely. That fact didn't mean much to me. In fact I found it absolutely amusing. I had friends, including Belgian friends. My father's uncle lived there, so I had plenty to do and I was bemused and amused by the pretensions at the bilateral mission. And I had a very nice girlfriend who worked at USEC, the economic mission, and so I was a happy camper. I remember I didn't get an invitation to the Fourth of July and there were a few other junior officers who didn't. I think the admin and consular officers, junior officers didn't get it. Well surprise, surprise. That was sort of old

Foreign Service. And I don't think any of us cared, now that I think about it, but I know I certainly didn't care. We had a very nice gang, actually. The young admin and consular all stuck together and it was a very nice gang.

Q: Well then you were in Norway from when to when?

GEISEL: Norway from '72 to '73.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

GEISEL: Philip Kingsland Crowe. He was an old time political appointee. We didn't see much of him either. Nice enough guy but totally out of it. A good DCM named John Ausland. Some nice people there but again, from my point of view, far too many people doing far too little that really mattered. I had more time for Norway than I did for Belgium in terms of our relationship. At least they had some Russians way up on the northern border. And they were nice people and I had a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful social life. I made a lot of friends with a lot of Norwegians and I was very unhappy to leave Norway when my job was abolished.

Q: Well did you get any feel, I mean your Norwegian friends, were they talking about the Soviets up in the, was it the peninsula, what do you call it, the?

GEISEL: Yes. Wasn't it the Kolopp Peninsula?

Q: Kolopp, yes.

GEISEL: Yes. Not very much. Of course, they had mandatory military service. Most of my friends were, by Norwegian standards, conservative. They certainly were not conservative by our standards. I certainly did not pick them on the basis of their having any political interests but I guess they were conservative by Norwegian standards. But we didn't talk much; they all thought we were idiots for being in Vietnam. And there were lots of marches. But you know, the Norwegians are very civilized, the marches by the embassy were always peaceful and never a problem.

Q: Working in the embassy, were there any problems or issues?

GEISEL: We were overstaffed and, you know, idle hands are the devil's workshop. I don't think there were any- oh, there was an issue. Interestingly enough, virtually all the male officers had Norwegian girlfriends. I'm talking about married American officers. That was a big issue, we had some very unhappy wives. I mean, really unhappy.

Q: Was there any effort to deal with this?

GEISEL: Oh no. It would have been hard to deal with it. The admin officer, my boss, was screwing his eyeballs out. He was divorced and he wasn't very interested, no. The DCM was very much of a live and let live kind of a guy.

Q: He was very much of a Scandinavian.

GEISEL: Very much so, yes.

Q: He ended up going to Finland I believe.

GEISEL: Something, yes. Well you know, if I'm not mistaken didn't we used to see for quite a few years didn't he write pieces for the Herald Tribune?

Q: Yes, I think so, yes. He died not too long ago but he was very prolific on Scandinavian matters.

GEISEL: Yes, yes. He was a thoughtful, very nice guy. But what do you do in a place like Norway in those days?

Q: Had North Sea oil come in at that point?

GEISEL: Not really. It had been found but remember it wasn't a big deal in those days. We hadn't had the first oil boycott yet and we knew, if you will, that it was going to be something but of course nothing like what we expected although my experience in Norway served me well because many years later I bought shares in a Norwegian oil company and they've been wonderful. I think the $3,000 I put in, no $6,000 I put in to it at the height was worth over $200,000.

Q: Good heavens.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Well you came back. Joan Clark, who was the-

GEISEL: Executive director.

Q: For many years, did you feel you were being anointed when you were brought into that?

GEISEL: You were not anointed by Joan. Joan did not work that way. It was very much like a fraternity. You were a pledge and you had to prove yourself. I did feel very much that Joan backed us up. We did our work well and Joan backed us up.

Q: What was your job? I mean, what did you do?

GEISEL: Well, I remember, in those-

Q: Excuse me; you were doing it from when to when?

GEISEL: I did it from ’73 to ’75, for two years, and I was the head of post management. Now today EUR post management, I believe, has 12 or 15 officers and the support staff and all the rest so they probably have over 20 people. We were a post management officer, an assistant post management officer; I ultimately got one working for me, for a long time it was only me. I had three staff assistants, they were called, and a secretary. And I used to say, when I was in a good mood, I would say that we were the administrative liaison between the department and Europe’s posts. When I was in a foul mood I’d say we were a bunch of goddamned gophers. And that was undoubtedly a mixture of both. But it was very, very hard work. We had an awful lot of issues. You know, we were just opening the consulate general in Leningrad, as it was called then. We ended up, it was tremendous work on my part and my assistants, opening up our embassy in East Berlin before I left. You know, I don’t know how we did all the work. But of course I was very happy because it was the first job that I had in the Foreign Service where I didn’t have time to be bored. I couldn’t do all my work. It was very, very good for me, of course, in learning how to delegate because there was too much work to do.

Q: Well did you find yourself having to deal with demanding ambassadors and all that sort of thing?

GEISEL: A few, yes. A few of them were jerks. Most of them were wonderful people and I got to know them personally. The one who I got to know best was arguably one of our most important, who was Ambassador Stoessel in Moscow. And I got to know him and his wife Mary Ann and their daughters. I got to help Elliot Richardson get started in the UK. You know, it was funny. I really hit it big because there were very, very few jerks. Now, one of them you worked for in Athens.

Q: Thinking of Henry Tasca?

GEISEL: Of course. Actually, he wasn’t as bad as his wife, I guess.

Q: Well no. I mean, the wife was a problem.

GEISEL: Yes, yes. No, that’s absolutely right.

Q: When I was there, well I was there from ’70 to ’74 and she I think had over 100 servants or staff went through the residence in the time they were there. Some of them were duplicates but I mean-

Q: I didn’t have a problem with Tasca. He didn’t bother me much but he-

GEISEL: No, not as head of the consular section.

Q: But he gave me, when I needed support he gave me support.

GEISEL: Well, I was interested because I spoke with a- Didn't- you- he actually were there because a great friend of Joan's, one of the reason were there was coming to be DCM, Monty Stearns, he came actually after we were there.

Q: That was before- after my time.

GEISEL: Ah. And I'm trying to think, no, I guess there was no DCM by the time we got there.

Q: Bob Brandon was the DCM.

GEISEL: Oh yes, that's right, that's right, he was there, but I don't remember who I was speaking with, I think it must have been younger officers there who were rather miserable, they felt that Tasca was too much in bed with the colonels.

Q: My personal feeling is that he was stuck. He wanted to keep in good with the colonels because the issue as it so often is whether it's true or not was if the colonels left it would be chaos and this was very much the Kissinger time and but I don't think Tasca- well nobody liked the colonels, I mean, these were, and nobody was close to them, these were not-

GEISEL: So you mean not even Tasca?

Q: Oh nobody was. You know, he may have carried messages and do what was necessary but no, I don't think anybody, my feeling was nobody was in bed with them but I mean, there we were, I mean-

GEISEL: Yes, I could see where younger officers-

Q: He was our son of a bitch, I mean, the colonels were our sons of bitches and the younger officers always hate this. I mean, they don't, I mean, they may be right or they may be wrong.

GEISEL: Obviously.

Q: It's like, I was talking to somebody who was talking about the time in Zaire with Mobutu and the feeling was well, you know, if Mobutu leaves it will be chaos. Well, Mobutu died and there's been chaos ever since.

GEISEL: Absolutely. It was pretty bad when Mobutu was there, too.

Q: Yes, but-

GEISEL: Fewer people were getting killed and fewer people were starving.

Q: And it held together more at a particular time when you had a predatory Soviet Union.

GEISEL: Yes, yes, of course that's exactly right.

Q: So there you are.

GEISEL: Yes and it's probably a good thing that the young officers, the young Turks or whatever they are are pushing back at this.

Q: Yes but it's a difficult time.

GEISEL: Sure.

Q: Well did you get the feeling that- was there any effort, maybe you didn't get involved in the personnel side, of people trying to get in and the European bureau trying to stick to its own people?

GEISEL: Oh my God did I ever. We used to joke about it. We used to say that, you know, that the people would go in to Joan and there was an instruction sheet that they were to go down and bend onto their knees and then she would graciously extend her hand and they were to kiss her ring and beg her for a European assignment. And if you remember there was a long corridor that led up to her office and they had all of the big Western European chanceries along the wall and you know, this was leading them right into the holy of holies where they would be permitted to beg for an assignment.

Q: How did you find Joan Clark?

GEISEL: Oh I loved her. She was one of my great mentors. I think much of the department did not love her but I appreciated her very much. You know, she was an interesting person. I assume you have tapes from her already. She never had any college education whatsoever; she went to Katie Gibbs Secretarial School. And right after that she went out as an FSS-13 secretary 10 days after VE Day in Berlin. She used to tell us how she had to go out in what was in effect an Army uniform. And I liked Joan because she was a very, very good manager. She had a wonderful system for following up on everything. There were some things that were not so nice. As I said earlier, you started off as if it was a fraternity and you were a pledge and then, at the end when you were going out and being rewarded with a Western European assignment, you were given what we used to call the traitor treatment because you were leaving and it was in a way like back at the beginning, you had to prove yourself every day because you could no longer be trusted. That's a lot of hyperbole on my part but there's something to it. But by and large she was very hard working, very dedicated and I thought her political instincts in terms of building politics were outstanding.
And I stayed friends with her ever since.

Q: Well did you get any feeling of pressure from outside from people either trying to, you know, trying to influence particularly living conditions or posts or anything like that?

GEISEL: Well yes. And you know of course it was the old story with the exception of London which always got everything. Most of the Western European posts the housing, especially for very junior people, was really not very good at all. And it was, to me always a matter of money. But remember in those days it was very complicated because FBO was very, very involved.

Q: Federal-

GEISEL: Foreign Buildings Office, now called OBO, what is it now called? I don't, well it's OBO but I forgot what it stands for.

Q: I guess Wayne Hays-

GEISEL: Wayne Hays was very much in there.

Q: Representative of Ohio who was sort of a rather nasty character.

GEISEL: Well nasty and corrupt to put it simply. I remember we had- we were doing some work in Berlin and needed more money and Wayne Hays' office called us up and said you know, there is this wonderful architect who can give you good advice and we urge you to use him. And FBO stuck us with paying for him for a consultation. And he was a lovely guy but he was of no use. But he came from East Liverpool, Ohio, the same place that Wayne Hays came from. But there were always endless permutations and combinations and things would get silly.

I remember a chap, fortunately I can't think of his name, who was to be our first DCM at the U.S. mission to OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). We never had had a DCM before, it was a very small mission, and this guy would call me up every day; they were looking for a place for him and nothing was grand enough. And I remember one time he called me up and he said Harry, you know, we had this one place but a third secretary from the Iranian embassy outbid us. Which I'm sure that was a lie. So yes, there was always pressure. I remember poor Harry Barnes lived in a terrible, terrible place in Bucharest and we eventually got him a new place but sometimes it was a matter of availability, often it was money.

Q: Well, was there a real dividing line between East and West Europe? I mean, not politically but administratively?

GEISEL: No, not from my point of view. But we certainly were more helpful. No, that's the wrong way to put it. We were helpful to everyone but we were more inclined to put our resources into Eastern Europe because we thought they had it much harder, which they did. You know, well, no different than it should be today, I hope, that, you know, hardship posts should have the better housing.

Q: Did you get involved in security concerns?

GEISEL: Yes but there weren't that many in those days. I was involved in security concerns primarily from the building point of view but it was a much simpler age. I cannot think of any issue that, well I shouldn't say it. I was going to say remotely was like terrorism but of course I'm very wrong because I was involved, Joan and I were out to Cyprus at the same time we met you in Greece and of course it was just a few weeks later that our ambassador there, Ambassador Dick Davies, was killed.

Q: Yes, Richard Davies.

GEISEL: But you know, security concerns were not what they are today by any means. There the security concerns were not terrorism, it was people trying to spy on us. And that meant primarily thwarting them in terms of buildings. Occasionally I would be on the edges of a case where someone was being pulled from post for fraternization or something like that. It was a totally different world. But those days there was no DS, it was SY and it was one deputy assistant secretary for SY.

Q: I think it was also part of the consular.

GEISEL: No. Interestingly enough the head of consular affairs in those days was the director of SCA, Security and Consular Affairs and to the best of my knowledge Consular Affairs never had anything whatsoever to do with security notwithstanding that it was SCA, Security and Consular Affairs. You figure.

Q: But you were doing, you had your two years there. This would take you to what?

GEISEL: '75.

Q: '75. And then what?

GEISEL: Well, there again, since you don't seem to be in any rush, I had decided that I was not going to go on hands and knees and beg Joan for a Western European assignment. So I saw that there was a vacancy, you know in those days it was all a matter of somehow finding out about things, that there was a vacancy in Port-au-Prince, which would have been a stretch but I spoke French and I thought, I was a bachelor, I thought well I'll just go to Port-au-Prince. So I called up an ARA as it was then called, personnel officer and manifested my interest and he was absolutely delighted and beside himself and shocked and said he'd get back to me and a couple hours later Joan walks into my office and says come to my office immediately Harry. So I go in and she closes the door and said I just received a call from Howard McGowan and I understand you're interested in Port-au-Prince. I said yes. She said why didn't you talk to me about it, Harry? I said oh Joan, I didn't want to bother you, you're so busy. And she snorted and she said well, just look at this. She pulls a letter out of her drawer which she was obviously going to show me at the appropriate time and it was a letter from the admin officer in Bern, Switzerland,

who said he was going to have to leave a year earlier for family reasons and he just wanted her to know about it well in advance of him telling the department. And she said well, Harry, Bern or Port-au-Prince? And I said well I don't know, Joan. You know, Bern, Switzerland, would be wonderful but I mean, Port-au-Prince would be a real challenge. I was biting my tongue, of course. She said oh shut up, Harry. Just go to Bern and stop this nonsense. And I said okay.

Q: So you went to Bern from when to when

GEISEL: I did. From '75 to '78.

Q: Now what job did you have there?

GEISEL: I was the admin officer, the head of admin.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

GEISEL: I had three of them, one of whom was hardly there at all; in fact, I don't know that he ever got to post, Peter Dominick, a Colorado senator. He thought he discovered that he had MS after he was confirmed or something like that and he resigned before ever going there and then he found out he didn't and he tried to get it back but he couldn't. And so for the longest time the DCM was the charge, his name was Harry O'Dell. And then we had Nat Davis, who Kissinger had kicked out of AF after they disagreed on Angola and he was banished to Bern. There's another guy who I just adored. Interestingly enough, do you know what he's doing today?

Q: What?

GEISEL: He's very old. Well, he went to the Naval War College as a faculty advisor after Bern but then he retired and was for many years the only liberal arts professor at Harvey Mudd College.

Q: Yes, it's part of that Pepperdine-

GEISEL: Exactly, yes. But Harvey Mudd is all engineers and whatnot. And I visited him out there last year as a matter of fact. He's very old. But he, I admired him tremendously. He was the most honest man I ever met in my life; he's such an honest, modest, decent guy, I thought the world of him. He was followed by the biggest scoundrel I ever worked for, who did literally end up in prison, a guy named Marvin Leon Warner. He didn't end up in prison for what he did in Bern, he was only ultimately withdrawn for what he did in Bern but that was after my time; it was a great embarrassment. We had a motto about Marvin; we said he screws everything that isn't nailed down.

Q: I have to say, Switzerland has a reputation for having some of the worse, not necessarily crooks but scandals.

GEISEL: Oh, absolutely. Faith Ryan Whittelsley, who came later.

Q: Yes, and others who, you know, practically turned the residence into a paid hotel.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: I mean, all sort of things. And then you had the man who was TDY in Arlington Cemetery.

GEISEL: Oh Larry, Larry Lawrence, yes.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: Yes, I knew him very well.

Q: Anyway. Well let's just talk a little about Bern.

GEISEL: When we get into the right time I'm one of the reasons that he was mistakenly put in Arlington Cemetery when I was in a very different job.

Q: What was Bern like?

GEISEL: Oh, as a town absolutely beautiful. What were the Bernese like? Some were really obnoxious. I was learning German and I had a poem: (recites part of poem in German). The translation is: There's a tiny policeman in every Bernese. He has an opinion about everything even though he can't do anything about it. It's far more poetic in German.

Q: How'd you find working conditions there?

GEISEL: Oh it actually was very pleasant in the embassy. Moral was really good. It fell when Warner got there but again, idle hands were the devil's workshop. We had one political officer who recommended the political section be abolished.

Q: I take it that this was not a place where you had to deal with a corrupt both government and workforce and all that?

GEISEL: No, no. Our problem was our Swiss workforce made more money than we did. I had what was called my class of 43. They were the three heads of the admin sections who all begun work for the embassy in 1943, four years before I was born. My secretary made more money than I did. I mean, the dollar was exceptionally weak and the Swiss franc exceptionally strong. But they were very good employees. It was very pleasant. Ultimately, of course, I was bored, I think most people there were bored.

Q: I would think, just on the surface it sounds like a boring place, you know.

GEISEL: Yes. Well, in that sense we were very happy when Marvin Warner came because, God, did he juice it up.

Q: Well you'd been post management officer. Did you suffer there from the problem that you were probably part and parcel of, particularly in the Canadian post where if we had problem people or particularly women, sick mothers, I mean they ended up shoving them to the consular section in London or all along the border posts, you know, a lot of marginal-

GEISEL: Yes. I'll get back to EUR post management because I forgot that my first secretary in EUR was a lady who had come from, I think it was Ottawa, and she had been arrested for shoplifting in Ottawa so she was sent back to us. Now, once you got to know her, you realized there was no way that she would have been shoplifting deliberately but she was so utterly absentminded and out of it that I would literally put my life up that she walked out with something without ever realizing she'd put it in her bag. But yes, I know where you're coming from.

Q: With Nat Davis, I have to say something because I heard it just the other day from David Passage, who's working for Henry Kissinger, and apparently Davis, during the time you were there was given instructions, he went into the Swiss government and then 48 hours later was told to go back and say those instructions are no longer operative.

GEISEL: That is absolutely true.

Q: And Passage said Davis sent a thing saying you know, it's undignified for the American ambassador to do this.

GEISEL: That is true, that is true.

Q: And Kissinger sort of- Passage said he drafted, as a matter of fact, saying Nat, I offered you freedom but not dignity, you know.

GEISEL: I never knew that. Well Davis kept all that to himself. But I'll tell you how Davis was so badly hurt by Kissinger. During that time that I was there and the work entirely fell on me, there was a meeting between Kissinger and it would have been Dr., no, would it have been Vorster? Yes, Vorster I guess, the prime minister of South Africa, would have been, I think that would have been '76.

Q: Botha?

GEISEL: No, no, no, no, it was Vorster. Botha wasn't in, that came much later. And…

Q: This is tape two, side one with Harry Geisel. Yes.

GEISEL: Okay. So we had this enormous meeting and in those days of course we thought it was unbelievable, I think Kissinger had 20 cars in his motorcade and he still had the

Secret Service. If you remember when he moved from national security advisor to secretary he had the Secret Service which went with him and it was a lot of work and we loved it. Davis had gone up with us to greet Kissinger. Kissinger gets off of the airplane and is just about to go in the helicopter because we didn't want him in a motorcade, and he looks at Nat and he says hello, Nat and he turns his back on him and ignores him completely. We'd reserved a room for Ambassador Davis, which was hard to get and he just came to me quietly, said Harry, I'm going back to Bern. But the story gets worse because this was concluded and it was concluded if I remember on a Monday. And on a Thursday afternoon, maybe it was even Friday, heaven help us, I get a call from SS/EX saying that Kissinger was coming back two days later and- maybe three days later at the most, I think it was two days, and he was on his way to Africa somewhere but he was going to overnight as a rest stop in Bern and the Swiss knew all about it and I should contact so and so in the Federal Political Department, which is what they called their foreign ministry in those days, and you know, get on with it, do the best you can, Harry. And of course it was hell for us, there were no hotel rooms, you know, you can just imagine. So I go trotting up to the ambassador who I told you I loved dearly but I was furious, and I said Mr. Ambassador, how could you do this to me? And he said what do you mean? I said I know that this was very, very, very close hold but, you know, if you would have just given me just a few more hours. And he said what are you talking about Harry? And I said the Secretary is coming here in two days. Do you realize what I have to go through? And he turned absolutely ashen because they had not told him. So I think that bears well with what David Passage told you earlier. I mean, that insult to Nat Davis broke my heart. But anyway, we got through it.

Q: How did the embassy in Bern relate to all the other embassies up in Zurich?

GEISEL: Well no, not Zurich, Geneva. Zurich we had our consulate general.

Q: I mean Geneva.

GEISEL: But in Geneva we had an enormous mission. Well, they were very laid back, we had very good relations. But the mission in Geneva, as is the want of any place that was even more overstaffed than we were, obscenely overstaffed, had us do some of their admin work. I remember we had to set up a local compensation plan involving a pension plan because, if you remember, there had been all these problems with our FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) who were on civil service retirement and then of course when the dollar crashed they were terribly hurt, none hurt worse than the ones in Switzerland, of course, because while their local pay when they were working was in Swiss francs, when they retired, the annuity was in dollars. And Congress did something that I thought was very fair; essentially Congress said we'll bail you out but no more FSNs go on civil service retirement, you've got to set up a retirement scheme. I worked for over a year with a local insurance company setting up a full retirement scheme for the Swiss and the mission of course joined it but didn't do anything except sign even though all the money came from the mission. But, all that being said and done we had great relations with them.

Q: Okay, let's talk about your relations with the crook.

GEISEL: Yes, Marvin was a crook. I mean, he did go to jail. He didn't go to jail for anything he did in Bern, he just sort of left in disgrace. But that was after my time that he left in disgrace.

Q: But what was your connection with him?

GEISEL: Well, I was the admin officer, of course, and if I'm not mistaken I was the only other Jew at post. Not that he was at all religious, nothing in any way. We also were briefly sharing the same girlfriend, which I didn't know about until later. Marvin was a character. At first we got on very well because I just decided to ignore his bullying- he was tyrannical and of course everything was go, go go, do, do, do. And I remember how, actually, our relationship turned and that really says what it was all about. He had me for lunch, well had a bunch of us at the residence one day for lunch and was giving himself and us a big pep talk about how important the embassy was and how all these important businessmen were coming to his conference to do this and it just showed people didn't understand the embassy needed more people, etcetera, etcetera, and I said oh, come on, they're not coming here because of the embassy, they're coming here because it's Switzerland. And he said there's Harry Geisel, has something to say about everything and knows nothing about anything. And you know we got on after that but there was no love lost between the two of us.

Q: I mean, was there problems while you were there of womanizing?

GEISEL: Oh yes.

Q: And how did this-

GEISEL: Well let me give you an example and I'll name names because the lady is old enough now that I doubt she cares. One time I got a frantic call from the ambassador's chauffeur that they couldn't find him. He was ultimately found in the Ratskeller but I'll go back. He used to invite various ladies to visit him and he had a motto, he never dated anyone older than 25 but this lady was an exception because her name was Susan Clough, she was Jimmy Carter's secretary, and she was an attractive lady, not probably up to his standards but being Jimmy Carter's secretary certainly had something to do with it. And he was invited that night to, it was a Friday night, to the dinner, the annual dinner that the diplomatic corps gave for the government of Switzerland, the seven ministers, the federal council; I don't know how many there are now. And he- it was white tie and of course the Swiss, it really was a racket because the Swiss really did all the work but then sent the bills to the ambassadors to pay for it.

Anyway, it was at the Bellevue Palace Hotel and you know the Swiss well enough to know that if it's at the Bellevue Palace Hotel it has a beautiful view and it's palatial. So he brings her there but there's a problem. He hadn't told her about it so she came in a short white dress. Everyone was in white tie and tails. And eventually, now, I put this all

together because you'll see the story got very involved and everyone in the embassy got involved, they were all in wherever they were, the antechamber drinking their little wine before dinner and a young lady from the federal political department, from protocol, is passing out engraved seating charts and Marvin goes up to the chief of protocol, a man named Ambassador Gotret, and of course you can imagine a Swiss chief of protocol is about six foot two with a beautiful mane of impeccable gray hair and mellifluous speaking voice in many languages, and Marvin, who came from Cincinnati but he grew up in Bur'ham, A'bama, Marvin says mah fren' isn't on here. And Gotret says well of course not, she wasn't announced to us. And he says but you don't understand, she's from the White House. Oh but she wasn't announced to us. Ah want to see Graber. Pierre Graber was the head of the political department. He does the same thing and Graber says well she wasn't announced to us and aside from that the dinner is for ambassadors and spouses only. And I'll get into that too. So he stalks off and everyone else goes in and the place of the American ambassador was very conspicuously empty but that's not the end of it because a few minutes later the president of Switzerland, the presidency is a figurehead position, it rotates among the federal councilors, the president's usher, goes up to him and says the American ambassador would like a word with him. The President that year was the minister of justice and police. And before the president could say get rid of him and all of this was heard by all of them, the ambassador comes up and says you've got to do something, she's from the White House. Well the president says quite loudly apparently, well what can I do, Mr. Ambassador, or Your Excellency, I suppose he would have said, I'm only the guest of honor. And Warner stalks out and that's when I get the call from his driver because he has disappeared. And as I said ultimately he was said, in white tie and tails in the Ratskeller. You know what a Ratskeller is?

Q: I don't.

GEISEL: Ah. Well, a Ratskeller is the German word, it's in the basement of the town hall, and a lot of towns in Germany and Switzerland they have a restaurant there to make money. And he's there eating with Susan. Well, come Monday he is furious. He thinks the United States has been embarrassed and humiliated and he goes off to complain to Graber. No, I'm wrong, Gotret, the chief of protocol. Well apparently Gotret got up on his hind legs and said no, you don't understand, you're not a career person, you don't know how these things are done. So Warner comes back to the embassy furious, blaming everyone but himself though nobody knew anything. I was the first to find out. I mean, I knew because of the chauffeur calling me that there'd been problems although I didn't know the nature of the problem. I got tipped off by his protocol assistant, a young British woman who called me, very upset after he had balled her out first. And I thought this won't be the end of it and it wasn't. And he proceeded to call just about every officer in the embassy in and ream them out for not telling him the way things were done. I was called in too but I kept my counsel, I didn't let on that I knew anything.

Well, the story gets better because I knew one of his favorite girlfriends, not the one that we were sharing, it turned out, but an American girl who was actually a junior officer working for the Agency at the time, and she asked me to come to lunch a few days later and she said I've got to tell you this, you're not going to believe this. Marvin had taken

her that night to a party at the Greek ambassador's place. Now, they loved, everyone loved inviting Marvin because it certainly livened things up. And apparently Marvin had decided to blame the papal nuncio because the nuncio was the head of the diplomatic corps and the nuncio was apparently the person who had announced spouses only because he was tired of the various African ambassadors who were all there for one reason only, to put their guys' money from the diplomatic bag into the Swiss bank account. The Nuncio was tired of them taking their white hooker girlfriends with them to the party.

So Marvin decided it was all the Nuncio's fault. So after the dinner and before the men and the ladies split off, he came up near the nuncio and he said: listen everybody, listen everybody, I want you to hear this poem. Now, the poem was a limerick from Playboy. The nuncio no speaka the English but I suspect someone told him and Marvin said, "There once was a man from Siberia, who had a complex inferior. He did to a nun what shouldn't be done and now she's a mother superior. Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho."

And it was interesting, some years later The Herald Tribune actually had a story about him, before he was out, and the story was headlined, "Some call the American ambassador to Bern an embarrassment." And the actual story was about him getting a whole bunch of American cars and putting them on the lawn of the residence and putting up balloons and whatnot and inviting people to see the American car fair. Which I don't think was all that bad but in the Swiss context it was terrible, ambassadors didn't do things like that, at least not in those days. But that was the gist of the story and there was also something in there, there was also talk about other things that he did which were even more embarrassing. Ultimately, from what I'm told, the Swiss actually most unusually went in and said, you know, couldn't you ask this guy to leave? They never P and G'd him of course.

After that, there was a scandal, you might vaguely remember. Remember, there was a thing called the Home State banking scandal, Home State Bank was actually an Ohio Savings and Loan and in the, I believe it was the early '80s, late '70s, I think early '80s, there was a big, big, big deal about banks that had been badly run, very badly run, criminally badly run and Marvin was one of those guys. I don't think that he was accused of stealing money as much as he was of gross mismanagement. I don't know the details but he did end up in the Ohio State Penitentiary. And after that he married a young girl and declared a fake bankruptcy. He was also married to Susan Goldwater. Do you remember her from TV here? Very pretty girl. I don't think she was Goldwater's daughter, I believe she was married to Goldwater's son, that's what it was, she used to have a program on WTOP. Marvin went through three, four wives, I think.

Q: Well anyway-

GEISEL: He spent about three years in jail and he ultimately died, allegedly bankrupt in Florida but you know, in Florida there's this big racket where you keep your house and he had one of these huge estates. I knew one of his honest bankers, if you will, a guy who used to sell him banks, so I sort of kept up on him.

Q: Well he was the ambassador when you left?

GEISEL: He was. I think he came in '74 and I left in '75. No, no, what am I saying? I got there in '75, of course, and I left in '78 and I think he came in '77 if I remember right.

Q: Okay. Well, I'd like to put at the end here where we were.

GEISEL: Good.

Q: So in order to pick it up. So in '78 we'll pick it up. Where'd you go?

GEISEL: Bamako, Mali.

Q: Okay. Well, you finally got your taste of something non-European.

GEISEL: Yes. Funnily enough, I had volunteered for Beirut but they were so anxious to get me in AF that that's where I had to go. I did not want to go there.

Q: Alright. Well, we'll pick it up then.

GEISEL: Good.

Q: Well today is the 6th of July, 2006. Harry, we're talking about 1978, you're off to Bamako. Let's talk a bit about, in the first place, I take it you hadn't had any Africa experience, you'd been a European hand and they dragged you out of the marble halls and put you into a bamboo hut or something?

GEISEL: Absolutely. Dragged me kicking and screaming but not exactly into a bamboo hut because remember I'm a fairly good admin officer so I came to Africa on the Concorde. Seriously.

Q: A very fast, supersonic transport of very expensive travel.

GEISEL: Yes. I discovered that there really is no cheap way to get to Africa, at least there wasn't in 1978, and the difference between flying economy class one way between Paris and Dakar, where I had to go first, and flying Concorde was only $800. Well now, $800 was an awful lot more in 1978 than it is today but it still wasn't a whole lot for a guy who was single and who wanted the adventure and the markup was much less than it was anywhere else. The plane actually didn't go to Dakar, Senegal, per se, it had a refueling stop on the way to Rio but, they did take passengers to Dakar and, instead of flying six or seven hours in the back of the airplane at night totally crowded, because economy class to and from Africa is always full, I flew in less than three hours between Paris and Dakar. We got on after a lovely few snacks in the Concorde lounge at Charles de Gaulle and I think we got off about two hours and 50 minutes later in Dakar; a very civilized way to travel. I never did it again but it was a wonderful experience.

Q: Okay, now tell me, Bamako, the capital, I mean-

GEISEL: The capital of Mali, if you imagine- the first thing that you know about Mali is you don't know the capital Bamako but you know its most famous city from antiquity, that's Timbuktu or Tombuktu as the French call it. It's an entirely landlocked country. If you picture that big bulge on the African west coast, you go some hundreds of miles inland and the big bulge is Mali.

Q: Talk a bit about the, as you saw it in '78, sort of the political-economic situation of Mali at that point in time.

GEISEL: Oh, one of the most impoverished nations in Africa, ruled by a military dictatorship for quite some years. The economy was really a subsistence economy with goats and farmers and a lot of people just sort of sitting around, in the city of course, but subsistence in the country. The country had been quite left oriented but always totally dependent on France. They were moving a bit more towards capitalism but it was essentially a preposterous place in those days. It's a rather impressive place now; it's one of the few real democracies in Africa these days.

Q: Who was the leader then?

GEISEL: The leader in those days was a man named Moussa Traore. Now, when he took over, throwing out Modibo Keita, who was an extreme left winger, he was either a lieutenant or a captain but over the years he kept promoting himself up the ladder to general. What was really a cute thing and would I like to mention it for the tape is, one day when I met some of the officers, I noticed the uniforms looked good and I kept staring at them because there was something that was familiar and then I saw what it was. The buttons were all the American eagle. Somewhere, somehow they had gotten buttons that they had put on all their officers' uniforms, you know, the nice gold buttons; they were the U.S. Army eagle, if you could imagine that.

Q: Well who was the ambassador?

GEISEL: My first ambassador was a lovely, lovely career lady named Pat Byrne, Patricia Byrne. A wonderful gal who went on to- let's see, Rangoon, as it was called in those days.

Q: Well now-

GEISEL: Now, I should say, you're probably going to ask, the AID mission was totally the tail that wagged the entire dog. And the embassy was relatively tiny but there was a huge what they called joint administrative office, which I was the head as the joint administrative office director, and I discovered what the hidden agenda was of the Department, why they were so determined to have me go to Bamako instead of Beirut, where I was willing to go, which was already plenty dangerous in those days. And it was

that the AID mission director was pretty impossible. He was known as El Supremo, Le Roi, the French for The King, or as we called him Leroy, and somehow the Bureau of African Affairs, which had known me in the admin business I suppose, had determined that I was the only guy who could stand up to him. And they were right.

Q: Okay. Well let's, before we get to that, which I think is probably your major battle while you were there-

GEISEL: The only battle.

Q: What was the embassy like?

GEISEL: Well, it was on, I can't remember the street, I believe it was Rue Mohammad Cinq. It was painted sort of pink like just about everything else in town if you can imagine a typical West African town. A cross- could have been, I wonder if it wasn't an apartment building once or what it was, it was quite unimpressive, a rabbit warren on, if I remember right, three or four floors, little offices and somehow we tried to make the ambassador's office look presentable. Across the street was a much larger compound with buildings that were jerry rigged, the way you build them in Africa, with tin roofs and the like, actually aluminum roofs, and that was the joint administrative section, most of it, and you know, with GSO and the motor pool and all these sheds and all sorts of people and mobilettes, which are motorbikes, all over the place and little shops and quite a large health unit, where a very ingenious nurse, who had been there, by the way, 17 years, which is another story we can get into, a Foreign Service nurse on worldwide assignment, Maxine Bradrick was her name; she didn't want to go anywhere else. She had gotten in very closely with the missionaries and since nobody wanted to go to Bamako, she stayed there. I think a year or two after I left they finally moved her over to Ghana, albeit very reluctantly on her part. But anyway, in that health unit, I'll never forget it, she'd done something very ingenious, she'd taken three or, no, I think it was six water heaters and she'd taken off the governors on them and so she used them to boil water and then she had filters at the taps and you would come with your big bottles to take home and have your boiled and filtered water.

Q: Well now, what was AID doing?

GEISEL: Oh, it was welfare for the privileged American upper middle class. The ambassador once asked me to study how much of Aid's money stayed in America or went to support Americans and it was 85 percent. I'm not sure what they were doing. I know in some countries it was easy to figure out. They probably had a few medical projects and they weren't building roads or growing crops or anything like that.

Q: Was there any problem with the Sahel?

GEISEL: Oh God, yes. People were starving.

Q: Were they involved in that or?

GEISEL: Not as far as I could tell. I mean, I'm sure they were in some way. They probably gave technical assistance, you know, they helped teach farmers how to farm or something like that.

Q: Well now, did the ambassador, Pat Byrne, sort of give you free reign to go take a look and try to do something or how would you describe sort of her relationship to the head of the AID?

GEISEL: Very frustrated. You know her, she's a lovely, kind, gentle person but she got her dander up with some of this more grandiose stuff. But you know, my job was not to needlessly pick fights with AID, and I took it seriously. I was not the ambassador, I was not the DCM and my job was to support everybody there logistically. And I only got in fights with the AID director when I thought he was doing something which was a violation of law or regulation. The fact that he had a program that I personally thought was a waste of money was really not my issue.

Q: Well was there the problem that occurred in many places, at different times, but where sort of the AID personnel were living far too high off the hog as compared to the rest of the-

GEISEL: Actually not per se. There housing- that's one thing I insisted on and I think my predecessors had insisted on too, is we had a joint housing pool. Perhaps the senior AID people gave themselves an awful lot of trips out but we- they certainly had much nicer offices than we had; money again was no object. They rode around in much nicer cars. In fact, I had a huge what I called my ghost fleet, which was their cars which they turned over to us for disposal and we never disposed of them; we just used them for the administrative section. And they of course constantly got newer cars. The old story, which you probably know is that State pretty well had these American cars, which never worked; the department has gotten much more realistic since then, and the AID people had local cars. I mean, we all had local cars personally but officially we had these damn cars that never worked. So I took over the AID castoffs and that's how we kept the motor pool going.

Q: Well then, was it apparent that the AID outfit wasn't doing much?

GEISEL: Oh yes, we all joked about it. Absolutely. I mean, joked about it or Pat Byrne often cried about it but yes.

Q: I would think that, you know, people working for AID would feel frustrated. I mean, after all, I mean-

GEISEL: The young ones did, the young ones did, definitely. You know, AID in those days, it probably hasn't changed much, recruited a lot from the Peace Corps and a lot of the youngsters who'd come in were very idealistic and were really sort of heartbroken

that they weren't doing much, that their bosses were much more interested in their comfort than in getting things done.

I should mention also we had a wonderful Peace Corps in Mali, which you know, was just the opposite. They were living out with the people and I think they were certainly trying to do good things and they were wonderful, wonderful people. I'd never experienced Peace Corps before and I was so impressed. I was a little sad, actually, that I hadn't gone into Peace Corps after college.

Q: Well how did the Malian government, you know, the administrative officer usually is the one who has to, to use the old term, interface with them and get along? I mean, how did this work out?

GEISEL: We bribed them, as far as admin was concerned. We didn't call it bribing on the vouchers; I would call it overtime for customs inspectors because we'd have medicine come in, for example, and we couldn't have it wait until they got around to checking it out so we bribed them to check it out and clear it right away. It was a pretty hopeless government. But they were- I should say I liked the Malians very much. Lovely, lovely people, which is why I'm so happy that they have a good government and they're really making progress now. And they were very, very nice but to get most things done we had to do favors, bribe, whatever it took. That was the case on the administrative level.

Q: Did you find that- were the French sort of running things?

GEISEL: Oh sure, of course. It wasn't to the extent that I found later when I was wandering around Africa for two years that they were, for instance, in Gabon, where they were right there in Gabonese uniforms, these big white Frenchmen and running everything. But the French certainly whispered in the ears. And you have to remember that in West Africa and in Central Africa, those parts that had been French, the French had them by the, well, to be polite, the short hairs because the Bank of France guaranteed what was in most places the CFA franc or, I forgot what they called it in Central Africa; in Mali it was the Malian Franc. But the bank notes were all literally printed by the Bank of France so the French had a hammerlock on the economy, which in a way was good because you didn't have the vicious inflation that you had in a place like Ghana, which just when it needed more currency, it just speeded up the printing presses.

Q: Did you feel, I mean at the embassy, that we had any real interest in Mali?

GEISEL: I think that most of the State Department people, except for the ambassador, remember, she's very idealistic and her DCMs (Deputy Chief of Mission) were quite cynical

Q: Who were they?

GEISEL: The first DCM was Ralph Grainer, the second was Keith Wauchope. And the political officer who from my time there was a fellow named Ed Bryne. He was outstanding; I hope he's giving his oral interviews.

Q: I have done him and I've done Wauchope too.

GEISEL: Oh good. I think they knew the score. Certainly Ed knew the score very well but he loved Pat Bryne and he'd worked for her when she was in Colombo I think as political officer and so Ed really, you know, tried. But our interests were, to say the least minimal, especially in those days. Let's see, who would have been the president in those days? It would have been Carter I guess. Yes, yes, sure. That's right, in fact, we even had Miss Lillian come and visit us on a trip.

Q: That was Carter's mother.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: What about were there any developments, any coups or?

GEISEL: No, thank God. No, there were coups around us but none in Mali itself.

Q: Were the Soviets, Chinese messing around there?

GEISEL: A bit. I mean, I think in memory of the good old days. They had the biggest embassies, both the Russians and the Chinese. Someone put a bug under the ambassador's cocktail table once in the office and I think we ended up assuming it was the Russians. We caught one of the Embassy laborers trying to retrieve it when we broke it but he just ran away. To sum up, I would say life there for all the embassies was pretty desultory.

Q: How'd you find social life?

GEISEL: Oh, I had a great time. I had a girlfriend who was the Peace Corps medical officer and again, most of us were young people and life was tough. You know, you'd go without electricity; we had generators but they didn't cover everything. And then cooking gas would disappear and most of use lived across the Niger River from the embassy and the bridge would get stuck and it would get hot and crummy but you know, if you have a good attitude it was almost fun.

Q: Sure, oh yes. Well usually at a small embassy things are more fun.

GEISEL: Exactly.

Q: I mean, more and more a sense of adventure.

GEISEL: Camaraderie, you know? And of course there was this gigantic AID mission and then the next biggest thing around was the admin section. There wasn't much else. And we all, thank God, stuck together and liked each other. I take great joy in the fact that I had two housewives who, one after the other, became by budget and fiscal assistants and I trained them so well they became budget and fiscal officers in the Service and they both went on to great glory, both became FS-1s.

Q: Great.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Well how well do you feel you were supported by the African Bureau?

GEISEL: Very well. You know, and I think it's still true to this day, in terms of competence; you could never give the African Bureau much above a C+ or B-. In terms of wanting to take care of their people, as far as I'm concerned, they've always been A+. And it was so wonderful to work with them. Always, always. Whatever I did, I loved working with AF.

Q: Well you were there until 1980?

GEISEL: Yes. The only other thing that I'll talk about because it was so much fun was, well there were two things. First a minor, well which became quite major, and then a very fun thing which was the Muhammad Ali mission to Africa. But let me take the other thing first, which was after about a year there we were- we had a center in Lagos, which was about the world's worst place to have an administrative support center, it was called WACAS, West African Consolidated Administrative Support Center, a bunch of warehouses which were near the airport and it was just, we would get food from them and they had this plane, it was called Pan African Airways. If I remember right, it was a DC-4 or DC-6, which would come out every few months, would make a circuit around Africa and drop off supplies, even household effects and whatnot, and it was a ridiculous operation. If I remember right the pilot, it was a Norwegian or something similar, he'd actually worked for a CIA proprietary before as a pilot. It was a hoot, it was fun. But apparently, eventually it got so expensive that we were told it would have to shut down. And I came up with an idea, and it just shows you how receptive the AF Bureau was, that we should use ELSO, Antwerp. ELSO was the European Logistical Support Office, which had just started in the container business I think in late 1974 when containers were pretty new and the idea was that household effects and official shipments and all sorts of things would be piled into lift vans which would then be loaded into these containers, the containers would then be shipped to Antwerp and then broken down and the stuff would be shipped in various other ways to Europe from there. Very efficient, saved a lot of money, that was quite exciting then. Well I said why can't we use Antwerp for Africa as well, because there are so many more sailings and even cheaper air freight from Europe to Africa than from the United States to Africa. The idea was seized upon by the AF Bureau, the EUR Bureau agreed and the A Bureau was absolutely delighted and I helped set it up with the Bonn admin consular, a chap named Tom Tracy, who went on to greater

glory. And it has to a large extent survived today. And when we get to Durban, I'll tell you about ELSO South.

But anyway, that was one of the more useful things I've done in my career. But if you'll let me, I'll talk a bit about the Muhammad Ali mission to Africa.

Q: Tell who Muhammad Ali was.

GEISEL: Oh, well, good idea. Muhammad Ali, what was his name before? Cassius Clay, a very famous American boxer, a Black man, quick on his feet, very smart before he got a bit punched up, and this would have been, let's see, in early 1980. He'd stopped fighting for a few years by then already but he was absolutely beloved throughout Africa. And Jimmy Carter got the idea that wouldn't it be great to send Ali to Africa to convince the Africans to boycott the Moscow Olympics. Why? Because of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan.

Q: In 1979.

GEISEL: Yes. Small world, this. Anyway, I was appointed administrative officer to the Ali mission to Africa. An Air Force plane picked him up, I think he was in India or somewhere, and we met the plane in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania and there were problems. There were a lot of AF stars on that trip. Lannon Walker, I think, was overall in charge; I think he may have been a DAS for AF then. Francis Cook was the PR person. Don Bandler was the political advisor. I can't remember who else we had on the trip but it was a hell of a trip.

It started off pretty badly because Ali didn't know what he was supposed to say or do. And I'll never forget, at his press conference in Tanzania, he said the U.S. and Russia is the two baddest white men in the world and I'm just trying to prevent a nuclear war. Well, I think Lannon and a few other people had a talk with Ali after that.

We then went to Nairobi and he got better but we still had to work on him. But it was crossing in the airplane from Nairobi to Lagos that we really had a chance to talk to him and explain to him what was going on and he got pretty good. He understood what was going on and he really was a nice man and he really wanted to be helpful. In Lagos, as you can imagine, he spent time with the parliamentarians and he saw someone from the government, I forgot who, but you know, politics in Lagos could be ridiculous; everyone was yelling and screaming and insulting each other and all the rest. And poor Ali, as we were leaving the next day, they brought in all the newspapers and he expected to see himself on the front page, which he certainly had been in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam. He wasn't because there was a rumor going like wildfire all over Lagos that these sorcerers had come and that they would shake hands with you and a few days later your genitals would shrivel up. Ali was way buried inside because of this; I think there were 12 newspapers and the Genital Story was on the front page of every one of them.

Well from there we went to Monrovia, Liberia, which was a very different experience. The president was a man named William Tolbert and, in those days, Samuel Do, was Master Sergeant Samuel Doe and Tolbert's guard, and I'm convinced that I saw him there. But anyway, we went to Monrovia for a rather short time and he, Tolbert just starts pontificating and Ali can't get a word in edgewise and Ali finally says to him, you a preacher? And Tolbert says well yes I am, I try to go throughout the length and breadth of the land spreading the glory of the Lord and all of that. Ali looks at him and says, I thought so. And he says have you written anything that I could read? Well, all of a sudden appear 12 volumes of the collected works of William Tolbert and Ali says this is wonderful; I'm going to read it all. Well, I said to a friend, I said you know, if they gave Tolbert a little button and they said, if you push this button it will blow up all of Liberia but Ali would like you to do it, Tolbert would have pushed the button. So we left the first country where they absolutely said whatever you want we're not going near those Olympics. I don't know if they ever were planning to go to the Olympics anyway.

The last country was Senegal. Very different place, of course. The president of Senegal was Leopold Senghor, who'd been there forever. And Senghor was a little defensive, a very nice man, and he said at the outset, I was against the boycott of the Montreal Olympics, which the Africans had wanted four years earlier because the South Africans were there. He said I just don't believe in mixing sport and politics. And Ali looked at him and said Mr. President, you are the greatest living poet of the French language—this was a bit of an exaggeration which I had fed Ali on the plane—and I am at your feet to learn from you. And that broke the ice nicely. But still, when we left, Senegal was going to participate in the Olympics but Ali made a good impression. And off he went and back I went o Bamako to pick up my goodies and leave for my next assignment.

Q: Where did you go in 1980?

GEISEL: Well, I went back to Washington but I stayed in Africa. And what I mean by that is the AF Bureau came up with a scheme to set up what became the AFRAT, which stood for Africa Roving Administrative Team, and the permanent members of the team were I, a general services officer and a personnel officer and we picked up various other people from time to time as we needed them. And for two years we literally went all over Africa, often just ahead of the inspectors, which I find rather amusing since I was acting inspector general in a later incarnation, trying to help embassies, provide them expertise and criticism but constructive criticism from friends. We would tell the ambassadors and admin officers that we were coming and we were there to help them work on whatever problems they thought were the most difficult.

Q: Talk to me a bit about traveling in Africa in those days.

GEISEL: Oh boy. Well, you asked a good question because it was pretty unreliable in some cases and there were some airlines we simply would not take because they were not safe. For example, Air Zaire. We wouldn't take Ghana Airways, not that they were so unsafe but they were so unreliable. You'd have Nigeria Airways, which was marginally safe but which always sold more tickets than they had seats. So that was always

interesting. By and large the planes would come late. I have at home a list of all the flights I took and I believe it was 240 flights over two years. I only was really scared, as opposed to furious, once and that was when we took off on a very short flight from Maputo to Harare on Mozambique Airways and after we took off we noticed—it was in a 737—and we noticed a bunch of the crew were around the front door as we were flying and they were pounding on it and sort of looking at it. All of a sudden, a stewardess came on the loudspeaker and said that Mozambique International Airways is pleased, well first she said it in Portuguese, is pleased to announce that we are returning to the International Airport of Maputo for technical reasons. We landed and they took us off and maybe about an hour later or so they put us back on and the same thing happened again. And then it occurred to me that probably that door wasn't closed properly. And sure enough, they made the same announcement and took us back. Well then we had a nice African thunderstorm, the airport was closed. You know, airports like that in those days you only had a couple flights a day, if that, and they just had us in a corner of the airport, there was no lights and we just sat there waiting. Eventually they told us to go out and it was raining and storming like hell and I don't know whether they took us to the same airplane or another airplane, but, whatever they did they put us on, they weren't messing with the door anymore, and we took off but we flew through the storm and it was thunder and lightening and turbulence and I gripped the seats. I was not happy and I'm a good flier; most things don't bother me.

And you know, you'd have other interesting flights like once we went to the Cape Verde Islands to Praia from Dakar and it was on a very, very, very old DC-6, which was in, as far as I could tell, in beautiful condition, I think lovingly maintained but still it was over a long stretch of water with nothing to touch down on if any went wrong. But our reward was when we got to Praia it was a sweet little embassy in pretty good shape and lobster was going for 50 cents a pound.

Q: Oh boy. Well what did you, as you did this, I would think that one of your big problems was that almost all of our embassies or posts were staffed by pretty junior people.

GEISEL: Exactly.

Q: First time around.

GEISEL: Exactly, exactly. And it was invariably, you know, I have to say, I can't think of any one of the admin people who we dealt with at the smaller embassies that weren't wonderful people who were so happy we were there, who were so inexperienced and were, you know, just delighted that they could turn over their worst problems to us. I also remember a bigger embassy where we were able to help in an odd way. It was in Monrovia. Bill Swing, was our ambassador there, and an old friend, and he invited me for lunch and then I knew he wanted something and he did. He said they had done a wage survey and they hadn't had the guts to tell the employees they were basically overpaid and they were hoping we could do that. Of course we did. But you're right, they were inexperienced people. It was a very, very difficult- I was physically broken down after six

months from all that traveling. I just had to ask to come home for a week or two just to catch my breath again. So it was a terribly demanding job but it was arguably one of the most satisfying I ever had.

Travel was usually by airplane but for one month, when I turned in my travel voucher, I had about 30 or 40 rides on African canoes across an international border between N'Djamena, Chad and Kousseri, Cameroon and I'll tell you about that. Chad has had how many civil wars. Well, I guess it's always one civil war, if you will, because it's still to this day the same cast of characters. My God that's what? Almost 30 years later. But they keep having wars and fighting and we would evacuate the embassy and then we would come back and evacuate it and come back. And it got really bad one time with most of the embassy destroyed but then things seemed to calm down so the Department decided to really open up our embassy again and we decided to open it up in I the ambassador's residence because we owned it. It was like setting up an embassy from scratch. Well, what was fun is the embassy in Yaounde, Cameroon, had sent a political officer, a chap named Don Bandler. Have you done him yet?

Q: I've done part of it and then he's drifted off.

GEISEL: Yes, now he's working for Kissinger Associates, or I guess it's Kissinger McLarty Associates. And Don, who'd also been on the Muhammad Ali mission to Africa, had been living in a house in Kousseri, which is in the Cameroon side of the Chari River and had been commuting, if you will, over the river on a "European ferry and negotiating, talking with the French- not the French, that's a Freudian slip, with the Chadian government, and I was sent to relieve him, I and my team, but as a matter of principle I was to live in N'Djamena. I had to go across the river to get my telegrams where, interestingly enough, the CIA had a safe house and their communicators were pulling in our traffic. I'm sure that's declassified by now, I'm not worried about that. In any event, I had only a single entry visa for Cameroon so I couldn't take the ferry that the Europeans took so I took what are called pirogues, which is how the Africans got across. Then one of the CIA guys would meet me on the other side of the river and take me to their house and I would read the telegrams and send whatever I had to send out. So, when I got back, I submitted a voucher with, I think we paid about, I had to pay white man's prices, I paid about 50 cents a ride but for that I had a canoe to myself.

Q: Well after doing this did you get caught in any civil disturbance or anything like that?

GEISEL: No, not at all. Let me think. No. You'd think that I would have and in my entire career I can only remember having a gun pointed at me once, which was in Brazzaville, which was in an earlier incarnation when I was in Bamako and they asked me to help reopen the embassy in Brazzaville. I forgot to mention that, and I allegedly went too close to the presidential palace and an AK-47 was pointed at me.

Q: Well then, we're up to about '80-

GEISEL: 1982.

Q: '82. Then whither?

GEISEL: Durban, South Africa as principal officer, as consul general. That was my reward, which was given to me by a grateful AF with a very, very grudging, well, I wouldn't say agreement of Personnel; it was rammed down their throats, as you could imagine, that an admin weenie was given such a prized political reporting job. It was also in a way pushed through, and I'll mention this because one of the things that I had done early on in this AF roving administrative team is we had heard from a very bright political officer in Pretoria, Sim Moats. He strongly suspected that there was corruption in the admin section. And he was so very, very, very, very right with the GSO at the heart of the corruption, a man named John Graham, who ultimately was indicted by a grand jury in Austin, Texas, but never had to do anything because South African Intelligence let him stay in the country, which scared the hell out of all of us because we wondered what he had done. We shared, if you can believe this, the old building in Pretoria with the state's attorney for Transvaal and with the South African police; we had half of the building, they had the other. Graham is the one who'd gotten us in there. One really wonders about that. I think it was proven well that he had done us in when I turned up so many different areas; the guy was so greedy there wasn't any way that he wasn't being paid of: he and one of his assistants. A junior RSO was also involved in a way and he got fired. A budget and fiscal officer wasn't involved with any of that but he'd submitted a fraudulent travel voucher and was relieved. Interestingly enough, he wasn't fired. ARA, as it was in those days, the Latin America Bureau, was so desperate for budget officers they picked him up. He continued to serve there. I suppose one phony travel voucher wasn't enough. In any event, the ambassador there was not amused. He ended up being pulled out early and because he'd done such a fine management job the Department made him deputy inspector general. Apparently, he was not very happy with what I had done. He sent the inspectors who were auditing the regional finance center in Paris where my travel vouchers were filed. They were apparently told to look at my vouchers and of course I was most amused because I believe that deep down in everyone's heart, where the light doesn't show, there's a little bit of larceny but, my price is infinitely higher than a few miserable travel vouchers. In fact, the Department has never had my "price." When the auditors found nothing in Paris, he seized on something which was true. He pointed out that I'd built a GSO warehouse in Bamako out of petty cash, about a quarter of a million dollars' worth of petty cash. He made quite a big deal about I and tried to block my assignment to Durban until this wonderful chap, who you probably know, Jack Bryant, came to my rescue.

Q: I know the name.

GEISEL: Jack was a civil service person who was forever in AF Post Management. Jack went to the ambassador designate and to Chet Crocker and brought with him a copy of the old inspection report from the previous inspection, which essentially said that, in view of the impossible situation with FBO and the Malians, that's what we should do. So that ended any attempt to block my assignment to Durban.

Q: You were at Durban from when to when?

GEISEL: 1982 to 1985. Now, I cut a deal with the ambassador, Herman Nickel, who really had wanted me to be the admin counselor in Pretoria, which was a higher level job. That was a senior job and the job in Durban was an FSO-1 job and I was an FSO-1 at the time, just been promoted. And the deal was that I would have 18 months in Durban and then I would go to Pretoria for the other 18 months and of course when we got near to when I was to take home leave I called him up and said I'm welching and he said, oh fine, you're doing a great job.

Q: Okay. Durban during the-

GEISEL: Apartheid era.

Q: Yes. Why was Durban there, what was sort of the situation?

GEISEL: Right. Well, Durban was a tropical port. It was by far the smallest of our posts. We had Pretoria and then we had consulates general, other consulates general in Cape Town and Johannesburg, which were far larger. The reason that we had Durban was because of the Zulus. The Zulus were the largest population group in South Africa. They were very well organized and they had a leader named Gatsha Buthelezi. I won't even try to give you the full name but Gatsha was his pet name and I was invited to use it and most people behind his back called him that; they wouldn't dare call him that to his face unless they had been invited to do so. He was a hereditary chief but he was a modern fellow. To this day I'm still in touch with him at Christmas. He was considered a moderate. And you have to remember that in those days the Reagan administration was experimenting with what became known, well, what they called constructive engagement, where we tried to speak about our ideals with the white South Africans but without confronting them and certainly without sanctions, in the hope that we could talk them into doing the right thing. I thought it was a great idea, just to get that out in front, and I was absolutely wrong and I could see by the time I left, that the only thing the Afrikaners understood, unfortunately; I shouldn't say the Afrikaners because I had many Afrikaner friends but the Afrikaner leadership, was someone hitting them over the head with an iron bar, even a two by four wasn't enough.

So our main job in Durban was political reporting. And staying in touch with Buthelezi and staying in touch, of course, with the local elements of the ANC and the Indian community. Most of the Indian community in South Africa was in the Natal area. As I said, it was very small which was the way I liked it. It's so much bigger now. We had a junior officer who was the vice consul and we had a communicator and we had a public affairs officer and by golly that was it plus a local staff, of course. The embassy stayed out of my way and did what I wanted in the administrative areas because everyone knew that the ambassador and DCM had a higher regard for my administrative abilities than they did for the people in Pretoria. So it was a lovely situation to be in. So, there I was, an admin officer who spent almost all his time doing political work and absolutely loving it.

Q: It was the Inkatha party, wasn't it?

GEISEL: It became known as the Inkatha party, that's right. The Inkatha Freedom Party.

Q: How did we evaluate them and the situation?

GEISEL: Well, that's a good question because I think that most of us knew that the ANC, the African National Congress, was where the ultimate future was. Buthelezi was really the moderate we were looking for but the South African Government was too stupid to give him more than crumbs. Had they given him real concessions, he might have been able to do something. He might have been able to inspire people outside of the Zulu area. He never had a shot, really. Still, I was there to keep Gatsha happy and to report on Gatsha. I had the great joy of also having, as one of my lead contacts, Alan Paton, who had been a great friend of Gatsha's.

Q: Cry the Beloved Country.

GEISEL: Yes, yes. Just a wonderful, wonderful person. And for three years I did political work with all the various groups in the Natal. We had some dissidents who were chased by the police into the British consulate and I reported on that. I established very good relations with the police to the point where the embassy would call me if someone was being detained and ask me to call the local head of the security police and see what was going on because I had much better relations with them than any other official American (except, possibly, the Intelligence Community). That relationship was probably because it was the only English area of South Africa and the police were more relaxed. I remember the divisional commissioner of police, who was invited to my wedding, was known as the" gentleman policeman." He ultimately got fired, or well, moved, he became an inspector, because he refused to use live bullets in a particular riot, which wasn't much of a riot in my opinion, and would only use tear gas and rubber bullets and his masters were unhappy with that. On the other hand, I also had great relations with a chap named Rolley Aronstein, who was the longest banned person in South Africa.

I should note I married a Durban girl, the daughter of a physician, and the wedding list made the front page of the Durban Daily News because it was such a mixture from the Provincial Administrator, who was the senior person in the Natal, to Buthelezi, to the head of the police and even the head of the security police to Rolley Aronnstein, to I forget which Indian dissidents were there but, they were there.

Q: Tell me a bit about where did the Indians fit in? Because they were considered Colored weren't they?

GEISEL: No. They were called Asians. There were four population groups and, in the goofy parliament which PW Botha created, there were three houses of parliament; one for the whites, which had all the power, of course, one for the Coloreds or what we would call mixed race and one for the Indians. The Africans, of course, were unrepresented because a tenet of apartheid was that the Africans would all go back to their homelands,

as they were called, which were these miserable areas outside of anything that was doing well in South Africa by and large. One of the homelands wasn't so miserable, it turned out they discovered platinum on it.

Q: Well did they have a homeland in Durban?

GEISEL: Well no, the Indians, they had an area-

Q: I mean like Soweto or-

GEISEL: Exactly. Yes, and it was called Chatsworth, as a matter of fact, it was the biggest Indian area in South Africa. Well, the Indians used to call themselves the ham in the sandwich. When I say the Indians I mean, of course, my Indian contacts, who would joke with me. The reason they said that was because they were afraid of the whites but they were terrified of the Africans. We didn't have many Coloreds in the Natal; they were primarily in the Cape. The Indians were a lovely group, actually, wonderful people. They were gentle by and large. You'd get, of course, some rhetoric but you know, that goes with the territory. They were not very politically astute, by and large. There were some Indian leaders but-

Q: Well Gandhi came out of that, didn't he?

GEISEL: Did he ever. Absolutely. From Durban. His house was near Durban until it got burned down when there was all the trouble between Inkatha and the ANC. I actually remember a group of Indian Muslim businessmen called the Orient Club, most of the Indians in my area were Hindus but these were rich Muslims, probably from Gujarat originally, and they were so conservative they didn't want any vote for themselves. They were perfectly happy to have Afrikanerdom running South Africa while they made a ton of money. Of course at the other extreme you had Indians who I knew were members of the ANC and who got themselves in plenty of trouble from time to time.

Q: Well what was Buthelezi and the Zulu movement, what were they doing during the time you were there?

GEISEL: Well, by the time I left, they were openly warring with the ANC. I remember once I was taken by Buthelezi, I and the defense attaché from Pretoria, to a secret training camp that the South African Government had secretly established, that was being run by some tough guy Israelis who were training them in combat. The Zulus would periodically demonstrate. I remember once, by 1985 when I was leaving of course the congress imposed sanctions over the objections of the Reagan administration. The Zulus had a huge demonstration outside of my house, which was composed of thousands of people, although it was perfectly peaceful because they knew that Gatsha and I were friendly. Within their own movement, the Zulus are a very disciplined people. Did you ever read The Washing of the Spears?

Q: Oh yes. Zulu Impis.

GEISEL: Exactly. Well the Zulus were really the warrior race of South Africa.

Q: But interesting, it wasn't that old as far as being- I mean, it was under Shaka.

GEISEL: Absolutely.

Q: You know.

GEISEL: You're talking about towards the latter part of the 19th century.

Q: Yes, before that they're just another one of the tribes.

GEISEL: Yes, well, even before that they were one of the more successful tribes when it came to fighting but still you're right, it was really Shaka who made them into a fighting force. Even when I was there, the Zulus were fighters. You know, you'd see these old men walking around in the middle of the day carrying umbrellas when the sun was bright and all the rest and you thought why the hell are they doing that? Well you learned very quickly the reason was that an old Zulu didn't feel comfortable without his stick and they used to load those umbrellas up with shot inside so they would really be like blackjacks.

I had a wonderful ANC contact. My main contact was a brilliant lawyer; Pius Langa was his name, who is now a judge on the constitutional court which is South Africa's highest court. I'd always predicted he'd be the first Black minister of justice. Of course he hated Buthelezi. The Zulus were being organized by Buthelezi, as best he could, into a movement to resist the ANC at least as much as the whites, which was really the problem. It's such a pity that this had to happen but it suited the Afrikaners to a T, of course.

Q: Was there any problem with socializing? I mean, we were making quite a point, weren't we, of making sure that we were not having whites only receptions?

GEISEL: Oh, it would have been unthinkable. Never had a problem, no, no. By that time the South African government had no problem at all with mixed receptions. I remember we had a black vice consul in Cape Town. I can't think of his name, Larkin was his last name; a huge Black guy who'd actually played briefly for the Washington Redskins and he told me that he had a white girlfriend, sort of a football groupie who'd come down to live with him, and he said he'd go into restaurants and they'd usually start to come up and tell him to get the hell out and he'd show him his consular id card to the manager and right away the manager would go around to all the tables sort of pointing at him and saying well he's okay, you know and all of that and everyone would be smiling at him then. So, by my time, the government wouldn't think of harassing us over something like that.

Q: Had there been any concern about nuclear tests or something when you were there or not?

GEISEL: If there was, I never knew anything. Remember, I was the tip of the lance in Durban; I didn't have any great knowledge of secret goings on elsewhere. I really don't remember anyone speaking about nuclear issues at Principal Officers' conferences, which is interesting because, of course they were a big concern. Nuclear issues may well have been so tight hold that maybe the ambassador and a handful of people spoke about them with the CIA or maybe not. I don't know.

Q: Ships visits?

GEISEL: None. Hadn't been any since I think the LBJ days when th, South Africans had discriminated against the crew of a U.S.-

Q: Aircraft carrier, wasn't it?

GEISEL: I think so, yes. Funnily enough, we had some sort of a ship, I don't think it was a warship but it was some type of Navy ship that called me up in a great panic because a crewman was very sick and they were relatively close to Durban and I had instructions, I don't remember if they were from the Department or from DOD, that if at all possible to find a way to get a boat to pick this guy up off of the coast but, if necessary, the ship would be authorized to come into port. And we were able to take the man, I believe he had appendicitis, off and get him treated. So I never had a ship visit.

Q: Well you married a young lady from Durban?

GEISEL: From Durban. She had been a law librarian and a Shakespearean actress. She said an honest woman couldn't make a full-time living as an actress in South Africa, which wasn't quite true, there was one who did, quite a famous actress named Janet Sussman.

Q: Yes, I saw her in-

GEISEL: Did you see her in London?

Q: I saw her in the movie about the czar, about the _____.

GEISEL: Exactly. That was her. Yes.

Q: And she's been in several others.

GEISEL: Well her aunt was the famous Helen Sussman, who for quite a few years was the leading member of the Progressive Federal Party in the South African parliament and who was the one of a tiny handful of MPs denouncing them for the treatment of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners. The Sussmans were a very rich, Jewish family in South Africa, which certainly helped matters. My wife was considerably, in fact to this day, is considerably more liberal than I am and she didn't have much truck for the ruling

National Party at all. Her parents were almost, well I wouldn't say rabid Progressives, especially not her father who was a physician and a pretty middle of the road guy but her mother certainly was and her brother and sister had left South Africa long before because they couldn't stand Apartheid and went to the UK.

Q: Well, was there much contact in Durban for you and all with what has been known as the White Tribe of Africa?

GEISEL: Oh yes. Well remember, that was my job. So as I told you about the police, who I got on with very well, I was also very good friends with the provincial secretary of the National Party, who years later became South Africa's deputy foreign minister. I used to go to their events, I spoke at their schools, I once went to a conference of magistrates and did everything I could to stay in touch with them; that was my job.

Q: Was there, I mean in your area, in was in Natal, wasn't it?

GEISEL: Yes. The province of Natal.

Q: Was there much of a, sort of a human rights problem?

GEISEL: Well of course there was. I mean, you know, it was the same government…

Q: This is tape three, side one with Harold Geisel. Yes.

GEISEL: Well, you asked was there a human rights problem in our area and I said of course there was because, the national government really dominated everything. Yes, Natal was definitely the most easygoing of the four provinces. I hesitate to say the most liberal because we used to have a saying that the Whites in Natal "talked Prog" as in Progressive Federal Party, voted NRP, which was the remnants of the old Jan Smuts United Party and said thank God for the Nats, the Nationalists. Well, it wasn't that simple but it was useful shorthand. There was definitely less violent repression of people, thank God, but there were still the same awful laws.

Q: Well what about this? I mean, go into a restaurant?

GEISEL: Well exactly. There were already what were called restaurants with so-called international licenses, which might never see a foreigner but where Blacks could eat with whites. However, they were in the most expensive hotels by and large. I remember one of our young vice consuls made a bit of a fuss with tongue in cheek because he asked a "Europeans Only" liquor store manager if he could go in and the manager said well of course and the vice consul said, but I'm not a European, I'm an American. I don't think the manager was too amused.

Q: How about the beaches?

GEISEL: Oh, strictly segregated into White, Colored, Asian and African. I'll tell you one thing, I don't know if it's change;, the Zulus did not like water very much, as in water to swim in. They really were not swimmers although funnily enough, the head of Safmarine told me how much they loved having Zulu sailors because even though they couldn't swim and they didn't like the water, they were so disciplined that they were ideal as sailors. The Zulus are like that; they have their hierarchy, they love their hierarchy, they want it carefully explained to them exactly who fits in where and then they follow it, which is just what you need on a ship, of course.

Q: Did you find any situations where you had, you know, visitors like the Jesse Jacksons or something-

GEISEL: Oh yes.

Q: -coming into Durban and, you know, trying to show, you know, to put the Afrikaners straight?

GEISEL: I had no Blacks that I would say fit into that category. I had a chap, I don't remember his name, who was a staffer from one of the House committees representing Howard Wolpe and I remember he came in and we took him to the Durban Municipal Government, which was a remarkably liberal, for its time because it had an equal employment policy. This staffer said to them well, you know, you have equal employment and that's something but you should really be discriminating in favor of the Blacks for all of the discrimination that they've faced. Well they looked at him as if he was coming off of the moon. You know, they were having enough trouble from the national government doing what they were doing. On the other hand, we had a very good experience with a lady named Constance Baker Motley. She was the chief judge of the federal district court for the Southern District of New York, of Manhattan, which of course means New York City, which is arguably, aside from here the most important federal district court in the United States. And she's as Black as could be and a woman with a beautiful gravitas and she came out as an IV.

Q: International visitor.

GEISEL: International visitor. Well, the Natal judges were by and large, even the Afrikaners, at the very least middle of the road with most of them quite liberal and all of them, as far as I could tell, really believing in the rule of law, which was certainly not a tenet of Afrikaner Dom. And the judge president of the Natal Supreme Court invited her to sit on the bench with him while he had a case, if you can imagine that, and that made headlines. The Afrikaner judges and what they call advocates, what the British call barristers, gave her a dinner at the Durban Club. They treated her with the greatest respect and regard.

I remember, I did have some of our visitors, often academics, who I thought were a bit stupid. I remember one woman was preaching on and on about one man, one vote in a unitary state. Afterward, when I was taking her back to her hotel, I said, you know,

you're lucky that the Afrikaners didn't say practice what you preach because we have two senators from Alaska and two senators from California and if you look at our election business, I love our country and I love our constitution, but it is not one man, one vote in the unitary state. And she was a bit taken aback.

Q: Did the hand of the embassy rest lightly on your place?

GEISEL: Very lightly. At the very beginning I got off, I wouldn't say to a rocky start with the embassy but I was- always spoke to the press and I think the press and I got on very well but there was one interview where I really pushed the envelope a bit too far and the ambassador came back to me privately, you know, an eyes only message or something.

Q; It was Herman Nickel.

GEISEL: It was Herman Nickel, who had been before that with Time and Fortune. He said Harry, you should have done it this way. And he was 1,000 percent right and I corrected the way I said things then and was never criticized again. In fact, my two fellow consul generals were quite jealous of me because I was lucky; I really was left alone.

Q: Well then, I think this probably is a good place to stop.

GEISEL: It is.

Q: And we will pick this up the next time in 19-

GEISEL: Well, '85, just getting ready to leave Durban.

Q: And so where did you go?

GEISEL: I went for what was to be a half-year at the NATO Defense College in Rome followed by, this could only happen at the Department of State, half a year of Italian lessons back in Washington, not in Rome, followed by what was to be a three or four year assignment as admin counselor in Rome.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then.

GEISEL: Good.

Q: Okay. Today is the 19th of July, 2006. Harry, so what happened? We're talking about 1985, is that right?

GEISEL: That's right.

Q: And you're due to go to the NATO Defense College for six months. Did you go?

GEISEL: Actually I did. And it was very enjoyable. I note that the Department no longer sends people to the NATO Defense College in Rome; I think that was a wise decision because while it was very enjoyable for me and a useful break, I thought that the education I got out of it was minimal and the standards were low and the military did not have, by any means, too many of their best and brightest.

Q: Well, supposedly, what was it supposed to do?

GEISEL: You know, that's a good question. I think it was supposed to make you sensitive to NATO and its problems and there was some usefulness if that was the case. It was supposed to expose you to officers of a similar level in both the U.S. and the various NATO defense forces and a few diplomats from those NATO countries tossed in. The problem was, in my opinion, that nobody was sending their best and brightest, I and a few friends excepted, of course.

Q: Yes, but this is often the problem because it's off schedule, for one thing.

GEISEL: That's right.

Q: For everybody.

GEISEL: That's right, that's exactly right.

Q: Six months.

GEISEL: From really September until February, it's a nuisance. You're right. And I think, and I criticize the Department for the fact that there is a, certainly a culture in the Foreign Service that you don't want to stray too far off the reservation for training, however in this case I don't think one should have strayed off the reservation. I have other thoughts about the stupidity of the Department when it comes to giving up our slot at Capstone, at the National Defense University, but that's a much shorter program and that is with the best and brightest.

Q: Yes. Well then, what was your impression though, of your other- of the NATO officers there outside of the fact that you felt they weren't the cream of the crop?

GEISEL: That's the long and the short of it. The U.S. and the Brits were not bad. Even with the U.S students, you could see these were people who were not destined for greater glory because they were not going to a senior service school in the US. So these were by and large guys who hadn't made the cut and it was a nice, relaxed atmosphere. I've pretty well maintained contacts in every place I ever went to, at least every friendly place I ever went to, I have only one contact from the NATO Defense College, a very, very good fellow who ended up some years later being the British Naval attaché here in Washington, which is a flag rank, and we were attracted to each other right away because I think we felt we were maybe a bit of a cut above.

Q: I was wondering, did you notice, did the Greek-Turkish love for each other play itself out?

GEISEL: Oh did it ever. You know, I think the Greeks were boycotting the College for some "insult" that must have involved the Turks. The Turks were certainly there and the Turks really had this thing about Greece. They also, interestingly enough, had big problems when we visited Canada. Let me not make any false impressions; I had a wonderful time traveling and doing all the things one tends to do at these sorts of places. When the Greeks went to Canada-

Q: You mean when the Turks went to Canada.

GEISEL: When the Turks went to Canada they were terrified of the Armenians and they had the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) with them all the time because there was some sort of "intelligence" that there were credible threats to them.

I'll give you one example which I think is worth preserving for posterity, just the total silliness of it all. We took a trip to Brussels and were addressed by the NATO secretary general; it was Lord Carrington, who was really a pretty good fellow. Then he turned us over to his French deputy, or a French deputy, which astounded me to begin with because I didn't know there was a French deputy. It gets into the business that the French quit the military side of the alliance, not the political side. And this guy was talking about this and that and he said there were ways that perhaps we could bring NATO more together. And I promise you I'm not BSing, because I've never forgotten this, he said one of the things they could think about might be a NATO ballet corps. No shit. I said "ballet corps."

Q: No, I deflated when I heard that.

GEISEL: I'm not kidding. I mean, I'm supposed to take this seriously? We then went on to France where at a briefing at the Foreign Ministry, someone was really laying into the United States about constructive engagement and our support for racist apartheid South Africa, which as I had said earlier, was already over; we were into the sanctions business. And I raised my hand but he was smart enough to look at me and figure that I was the American diplomat so he didn't recognize me. I was just going to ask him about how he felt about France's continued great support for Mobutu Sese Seku, the great light of the world of Zaire. But he didn't call on me and I wasn't rude enough to interrupt his anti-American tirade. I looked at him as the fool that he was.

Q: Well did you then go on to take Italian? I mean, was this whole thing on course?

Actually, my onward assignment was supposed to be consul general in Düsseldorf. Now, in typical Department style, EUR had called me up and said look, we're closing Düsseldorf but it's useful to put you in there anyway because we know you're going to be promoted and then you'll be eligible to be admin consular in Rome and we're not going to let personnel fill that job until the promotion list is out. And as usual, EUR was right and after I got promoted I went back to the department and my career counselor said

well, you know, there'll be a lot of competition for that admin job. And I said oh, but EUREX said they want me. He said oh, in that case, there's nothing to talk about. And that was that. And I went to Rome.

Q: Well you were in Rome from when to when?

GEISEL: Well, there again, the three years didn't work out. I was actually there from September of 1986 to March of 1988, when I was direct transferred to Bonn.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about Rome. Who was the ambassador?

GEISEL: Maxwell Rabb.

Q: Now he's one of these characters. He was there a long time. Talk about working with Maxwell Rabb.

GEISEL: It was an absolute delight for me. He and I got along very, very well and I'll tell you how it all started. You know, admin officers can get away with things that other people can't if they do it with a bit of a smile and some humor. About two days into my posting I was up to see him and his wife Ruth was there as well. And he started crying to me about how he was, I think, $20- or $30,000 out-of-pocket on his representation. And I looked at him and I said, look Mr. Ambassador. You live in Villa Taverna, one of the most glorious houses in Rome that was once the summer residence of the Holy Fathers. You go all over Rome in a Cadillac limousine with a motorcycle escort to beat the traffic, you have one of the best cooks in Rome and you get a salary of $90,000 a year. I'll tell you what. If you're not happy with it, I'll pay the $30,000 out-of-pocket and take your place. He looked at Ruth and the two of them just started laughing and laughing. And we were great friends ever since and we even became business partners in a partnership after Rome. You have to know the guy you're talking to. I mean, there are guys who would have thrown your rear end right out of there on the spot.

Q: Yes. Well tell me, what were let's say the challenges of being-

GEISEL: Admin counselor in Rome? Well, the biggest challenge is, to put it the way the Italians put it, well, it depends where you are. You know, if you're in Milan the Italians say that Africa begins south of the Po and if you're in Florence the Italians say that Africa begins south of the Arno. And if you're in Rome they say it begins south of the Tiber. So for an admin guy the problem really is that the Italians are the loveliest, nicest people in the world who can do a great job when they're motivated to do it but there are more important things in the world than minding the bureaucracy. We would have plumbers who would come out to residences without all their tools and then they would announce they would have to go back and get more tools. We would have painters that wouldn't have the right shade of paint. So if the chips were down there's no one I'd rather count on as much as an Italian; they're wonderful. But on a day-to-day basis it was very frustrating because you really had to motivate people to do the job that you expected them to do. Morale at the embassy was not good because so much of our- well, I

shouldn't say that. Morale among the staff was not good, which bothered me a great deal because they, the staff employees, were living in a big apartment building that was in a shameful condition, especially with respect to furniture and furnishings but also in terms of maintenance. I told the ambassador that he had to come out to this building; it was called Grazioli, to show the people that he cared. And he did, complete with the motorcycle escort and the works. We went through apartments, saw how bad the situation was and we gathered all of the families together and I said come hell or high water I was going to get the department to give us money to buy them new furniture and to fix the place up. Come year end, we just pushed on the department like there was no tomorrow and the ambassador did as well and we managed to get a lot of money and we got them a lot of furniture and furnishings and painted the place and fixed it up in many ways.

Rome was a wonderful place but you had a real problem- you know, they always say that American embassies to some extent reflect the host country. So you have a place like Rome where the embassy is just gorgeous on the outside.

Q: Yes, there's the Queen Mother's house.

GEISEL: Exactly, Queen Margaretha. In fact, I don't know if anyone has told you that if you went on what they called the Piano Nobile, the noble floor, there were lovely tapestries on the wall. But if you pulled one of them back you saw there was engraved in the marble a tribute that said on such and such a day the great Mussolini visited the Queen Mother at Palazzo Margaretha. Oh, it was a glorious place. But then you compare it to a place like Germany. Well Germany, the building in Bonn was very efficient and it was all gray and steel and worked very well, you know. And our embassy in Oslo where I was, it was designed by a noted Scandinavian-American architect. You get the picture. Well, in Rome, one of the things that's not so nice is that people are very conscious of hierarchies in Rome and there was, in my opinion, too much of that in the embassy.

Q: Well, I mean, there was nothing like going in to the ambassador's or the DCM's office. I mean, frankly, it was un-American.

GEISEL: The ambassador's office was a former ballroom of the palace but the two offices weren't really the problem. You know, if I would philosophize a bit, I would say the problem was you have a language like Italian, which really isn't good anywhere except in Italy; well, not even in Somalia.

Q: No.

GEISEL: Where in the heck else was it?

Q: Libya? But no.

GEISEL: Not even Libya anymore. Italian is really only good in Italy and so what you have, and rightfully so in terms of people having to need to know the language and having the contacts, the same people keep coming back over and over again in higher and

higher jobs and that makes a hierarchy almost inevitable. And it's very bad for the people who are who are coming in as staff employees. It's difficult for the other agency people. There were, of course, far too many other agency people, and I don't mean "the" other agency.

Q: No, we're talking about FBI-

GEISEL: Exactly.

Q: And they tended to put people in who were of Italian extraction.

GEISEL: Precisely.

Q: Which isn't always the best-

GEISEL: No, it-

Q: For one thing, and that's speaking Italian anyway, they're speaking-

GEISEL: Well, speaking Sicilian, and that was part of the problem because in many cases there were people from the south who had, you know, bastardized American Southern Italian accents and vocabularies, which of course the Romans looked their noses down.

Q: Oh yes. I speak as a former consular general in Naples.

GEISEL: Oh.

Q: And I was not an Italian hand at all. For one thing, most people in Rome really didn't want to go down that far because it's kind of dangerous down there, you know?

GEISEL: Yes. I never felt in danger but I know what you mean. Were you still rattling around that gigantic building, the old consulate general?

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: Oh my God.

Q: But it was falling- I was there during the earthquake, we had a very major earthquake there in '79.

GEISEL: That's right, yes. That place was unbelievable. I mean, where you were was truly a vestige of a bygone era with all these examining rooms from the wave of Italian immigrants who came in the '50s and I don't know how many U.S. Public Health Service doctors they had assigned to that post to just examine the people before they got on the boat to go to America.

Q: Yes. And immigrations almost had stopped by that time.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Well tell me, how about security? This must have been, because you had, what was it, General Dozier?

GEISEL: That was after my time. We did have one rocket attack on the embassy by the Japanese Red Army Faction, now that I think of it, that was just before the, I think in those days it was the G-7. They rented some hotel rooms across the street from the embassy and they didn't do much damage but it was a concern. The ambassador was heavily and I think rightly guarded, as was his wife, for that matter, and we put in quite a few security structures when we were there. Now of course the great battle, which we were largely successful at, was to get the Department to spend more money so that the security structures didn't look so bad, at least around our more beautiful buildings such as the embassy and the embassy residence.

Q: Yes. How did you get on with organizations like the FBI and Immigration and Treasury and all that?

GEISEL: I got on very well. We had no problems.

Q: Yes. Were you running across, had the problem been solved about paying taxes on, I mean the locals paying taxes to the Italian government on their salaries?

GEISEL: I didn't have that issue.

Q: Because that was a major issue a few years earlier in the early '80s.

GEISEL: No, it must have been solved. Interestingly enough, when we get to when I was IG (Inspector General) we can talk about that in London, because that made Rome look like a tea party.

Q: Were you closing any posts or not?

GEISEL: There was talk. There was talk of Turin but I think it was still open, barely hanging on. Yes, it was still open. Trieste had been turned into a consular agency by then with the marvelous Paolo Bearz and I understand that that was just closed very recently and I don't know why, hopefully because Paulo couldn't do it anymore because he would have been much too wonderful to lose if he could stay. Venice was closed with the consulate turned over to Wake Forest College. Naples was threatened but not all that much. No, you know, I don't think anything's changed. They've all gotten a bit smaller and they're all under threat.

Q: You know, some of them, Palermo's got all-

GEISEL: Oh, Genoa was closed, yes, yes.

Q: Well at one time we just had far too many and if it weren't for the military probably Naples could go. That would have meant that the hordes of southern Italy Italians would have come to Rome which I don't think that, you know, we served as an outpost's sake.

GEISEL: I think that's right but I think it's because of the military that we-

Q: Yes, it's the military.

GEISEL: -have no business closing.

Q: We've got the Sixth Fleet--

GEISEL: Yes, yes.

Q: Well, they've got a big installation there.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: How about labor problems?

GEISEL: Oh yes.

Q: The Italians were always having these strikes.

GEISEL: Yes, we had a few. We even had a general strike where everything was supposed to close and it was so Italian because everything did close except that the garbage collectors, who didn't work very much to begin with, all came out and worked on the day when everyone else went on strike, which was very Italian. We had a couple strikes at the airport which made life a misery but we didn't have too many problems.

Now you know that you talk about labor problems and there's something that I'll mention for posterity. In Italy the labor courts were very strong. The embassy generally lost in labor courts, in the Italian labor courts, and I remember one case where we lost where, you know, the losing never meant that we had to take an employee back; we were told either take 'em back or pay 'em so much more money. I remember complaining to the Department of Justice attorney in Munich from the Civil Division and he'd been there forever and his specialty was labor courts and he told me something, he gave me wisdom that I thought was so accurate. He said, Harry, we're an honorable country and a judge from the labor court told me I'm not here to mete out justice, I'm here to protect the workers. My friend said this is the cost of doing business in Italy as an American Embassy. I thought that made so much sense.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: So we didn't defy any labor courts. I had to hold my nose but it was the cost of doing business and as long as they didn't make us do anything other than pay people more money than I thought they ought to get, I thought fine, it's the cost of doing business.

Q: How about dealing with organizations like Customs?

GEISEL: Slow, chaotic but almost always we had a Foreign Service National employee who knew someone or a cousin or a brother or something and was able to get things done if it had to be done and that's what I liked about the Italians. If there ever was a real problem you could find someone and then say this is a real problem and they'd work it through. Well, when in Rome do as the Romans do. And I'll tell you what I'll talk about just because I think it was a bit interesting. We had a G-7-

Q: The conference of the-

GEISEL: The heads of the group of seven, the United States and the big European countries; it's now as we talk the G-8. It was to be in Venice. The president was President Reagan and, as you can imagine, everybody from the White House thought of some reason they had to go on a pre- pre- pre- pre-advance, a pre-advance, you know, all the rest of Venice and of course I went up with them to baby-sit. And everyone was very nice and it got to be- everything started changing because the government fell. So the visit to Rome that President Reagan was going to do was scrubbed except for a very brief visit which had to take place really to see the Holy Father and a courtesy call on the president, the president of Italy who was, as you know, is a ceremonial figure. And I think he may have seen the caretaker, prime minister, I'm not sure. I suppose it was Andreotti if it was. And this created endless problems and one of my contacts put it very well to me. He said Harry, don't worry, we Italians see the forest for the trees. He said it's just the opposite, you'll see, if you ever have to do a G-7 in Germany, the Germans will worry about all the details but they won't worry about the big picture. And how little did I know then that I was going to be transferred to Germany and he was absolutely right. But I still, I'm trying to think how many people were at that summit from the American side; it was obscene. I think we had 36 boats at $1,000 a day per boat. And you know, it went on and on. Then I remember, the Secretary, Secretary Shultz, was coming in for a very short time, I think a little less than 24 hours because there was some other thing going on that he had to go to and yet the people from DS came to me and they demanded or he, the head of their advance, demanded" parity" with the Secret Service. He said if they have 12 boats I want 12 boats and all of that and I said I won't give them to you. I said you've got three stops, the President has 12. Well, he made all sorts of threats and I was sure he was bluffing; whether he was bluffing or not he didn't get the boats and somehow I survived and prospered. But you know, this is the thing that always gets to you is how people have no respect for the taxpayers' money at all.

Q: Well then, were you there when the Achille Lauro was seized?

GEISEL: No, that was a bit before my time. I did have a very tragic killing, massacre really, in the airport by oh, some Arab terrorist group, I forgot which one. It was passengers getting off, I believe, of a TWA flight. But it took place in the lobby. I don't understand, maybe it wasn't even passengers. It was Americans and if I remember right, eight were killed including a little girl who was at the school that most of our embassy kids went to. You know, there again that's the sort of thing that once the Italians had a wake up call they were darn good and they were. But I remember just what a terrible, terrible feeling it was when that happened.

Q: Were you running into something that probably developed later but the growing almost Africanization of Italy? I mean, you know, so many immigrants from southern Italy and-

GEISEL: That was later.

Q: And Southern Africa came in.

GEISEL: No, no, no. You know, you would see Ethiopians and Somalis but no, it was not noteworthy the way it was later on. Actually the biggest thing that we noticed was the gypsies, that I'm sure were a problem down in Naples too. And you know, we would have a lot of issues with gypsy kids running around and messing with American tourists and picking their pockets and grabbing their bags and all of that. You know what was so nice though is I always used to say that the Italians were much more likely to pick your pocket while, you know, some of the northern Europeans might put a gun to your head.

Q: Yes. So you were there, how come you didn't last so long?

GEISEL: Well, because the inspectors came up with a terrible and I thought largely unjustified report on Bonn. And the ambassador was yelling and screaming-

Q: Who was the ambassador?

GEISEL: The ambassador was Rick Burt. And Rick was screaming something had to be done. His admin counselor was due out so it wasn't a matter of firing his admin counselor, which would have been shocking anyway but I he was apparently screaming, " I want the best" and I don't know that I was the best but I was the one who EUR asked if would I take a mid-tour transfer. It was not easy with respect to my wife and I can't say I blame her, to give up Rome for Bonn. She had a lovely life in Bonn but as she said to me, there was more history in our block in Rome than there is in half of Germany, and she never totally forgave me for leaving Rome to go to Bonn even though she understood that it was a much bigger job. It was much bigger in terms of the enormous embassy that we had in Germany and the huge constituent post; I think at that time, if Frankfurt had been an embassy, it would have been the fifth biggest embassy we had.

Q: Well you were there from when to when in Bonn?

GEISEL: I was in Bonn from March of ’88 to July of ’92. I think, yes, it was my longest assignment by far.

Q: Talk a bit about Ambassador Burt.

GEISEL: Rick Burt was really smart but he was disliked by some of the staff. He was disdainful of some of them. All that being said and done I thought he was a very bright guy, very able, and he understood the Germans very well.

Q: Who was his DCM?

GEISEL: DCM was Jim Dobbins. I liked Jim very much, I do to this day but, some people didn’t. Jim is simply one of the smartest people in the universe and he’s sort of a reserved guy and what I especially liked about Jim is that he never bothered me. What I mean by that is he never messed around because he assumed that most admin stuff was not for him. He also didn’t bother people who worked for him in general. You know, if he didn’t have anything to do he would go walk along the Rhine and memorize German words. Now, this is what a manager should do. You know, in the best of all worlds your subordinates are doing their job, they’re doing it well, you’re there to support them and that certainly was the way Jim was with me. Now, he could be very, very, very tough on his subordinates and he certainly made enough enemies in his time but I found him very able, immensely able. You know how Mark Twain once allegedly wrote a letter to a friend and he said I’m writing this letter in two pages because I don’t have the time to write it in one page? Jim Dobbins was one of those superior people who could say everything that needed to be said and use very few words to do it.

Q: Very, very analytical. He’s at Rand now.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: I’ve interviewed him.

GEISEL: Oh good. Did you think he was pretty bright?

Q: Oh yes. I mean, no doubt about it.

Let’s talk, first let’s talk about the German staff. How did you find the German Foreign Service Nationals?

GEISEL: Well, I’m glad you asked because there were so many of them and they cost us so much money and most of them were simply outstanding. And when I say German staff I of course include the many TCNs, Third Country Nationals that we had in the admin section. Standards were very high, well educated, devoted to doing their jobs right; obviously just like what’s the case in many places, the youngsters sometimes weren’t as highly motivated as the old-timers who had been there since before there was an embassy, when it was the High Commission for Germany, that moved up from Frankfurt

to Bonn in when was it, I guess about 1948 and 49. And you know, in those days, I have an old manual, actually, that was given out during the occupation, we fed them, we fed them lunch because there wasn't any food, you know, and this was our way of keeping them going. One of the great social events of Bonn, and I kid you not, was called the Motor Pool Ball. Yes. Because once upon a time the very best and the brightest Germans went to work as drivers, because they could speak English, for the American High Commission which became the American Embassy. There were things like that. The embassy had an enormous complex, residential complex, in Bad Godesberg and there we had there the American Embassy Club. Well the American Embassy Club had a huge dining facility, it had a snack bar, it had a bowling alley, it had a swimming pool; I don't know what all else it had. And for the Germans, to be a member of the American Embassy Club was something very special. The speaker of parliament, a lady named Rita Susmuth, had a special table. Every, I think it was Wednesday; she would have lunch at the American Embassy Club and invite her friends to this lunch. The American Embassy in Bonn was still a very special place albeit more special with the older Germans and our older FSNs very much reflected this; they just didn't come any better, with the work that they did, some Americans could just put their feet on the desk and do nothing because the Germans were so good.

Q: Well, I imagine the budget for the locals by this time was-

GEISEL: Astronomical.

Q: They were earning more than the Americans, weren't they?

GEISEL: Depended on the exchange rate. Yes they were. It wasn't the way it was in Switzerland, where I believe my secretary, let alone the more senior people, made more money than I did. But yes, I would say in terms of pure salary the senior Germans were up there with the more senior Americans. And they were worth it, frankly speaking. Most of them were worth it. Now, there were a few that had retired in place. I remember an old lady who worked for the science attaché who just, she, I don't know if she had Alzheimer's or what she had but she was useless and she was just working because she wanted to work. It was preposterous because her pensions, between her civil service pension and her German social security were just as much as her salary and she was old enough to retire. And I remember forcing her out. A number of science attaches had been afraid to do it and I just said this is just too much money. However, by and large the old timers were just wonderful and I was sorry whenever they retired.

Q: How did you find dealing with the German establishment? I'm thinking of the Customs, the contractors and all that.

GEISEL: Well, it depended. You know, they were, they could be inflexible, definitely the mark of a German bureaucrat. I had very, very, very good relations with the people in the ministry of finance who dealt with the Berlin budget. I'll digress here just to mention the Berlin budget. The Berlin budget was very important because they paid everything in Berlin, both for DOD and State except for the salaries of Americans. Everything. So for

instance our embassy, or our mission I should say, of 36 Americans had 24 cars and drivers, many of the vehicles were Mercedes Benzes. Just like every American Embassy, of course!

Q: Oh, absolutely.

GEISEL: Our people lived the way you couldn't imagine in these beautiful houses, many of which had been Jewish houses that the Nazis had taken and which the German Federal Government had compensated the heirs of the victims and then taken over as government houses and gave to us. Then we also built new houses at the Germans' expense, five of them that were built for staff. Rick Burt I think properly called them the Golden Greek temples. And there that was one of the few times that the Germans came to me and they said please, there's going to be trouble in the newspapers, don't give them to staff. Make sure that diplomats are living in them. And we did, much to the sorrow of our staff. Speaking of the Berlin Budget, my predecessor was a chap named Dick Bowers. He ended up being ambassador to Bolivia. He came up with the idea of a Berlin budget office at the embassy, headed by a retired FSO admin type who spoke perfect German, a fellow named Dan Thal, who you might very, very, very much want to talk to.

Q: Dan Fee-

GEISEL: No T-H-A-L. Thal. It means valley in German. He lives in Boston. And he headed the office for I think about eight or nine years and the Germans paid for it which was the best deal of all because it was part of the Berlin budget. Well, what it meant is where the embassy previously had been the messenger for DOD, which of course consumed almost all the money, presenting their requests to the German government, we started holding hearings and having them justify what they were doing and they hated it but they had no choice because the ministry of finance would not talk to them, at least not the ministry of finance in Bonn. So we had this Berlin budget office in the Embassy Admin Section that did the heavy lifting with the ministry of finance and all I did was sign and smile and talk to the big shots. We had wonderful relations with them, though. As for other areas, we had good relations with the foreign ministry, from my point of view, no problems. Tax issues, as you would expect; you know the usual value added tax stuff and driver's licenses but nothing that was difficult and they were great to work with when it came to stuff like the G-8 or G-7 I should say. Customs, inflexible but you know, you could deal with them. I had more fun with the Italians but arguably I got more done with the Germans, people like Customs and police, although there again when you want to talk about it, when the first Gulf War broke out we had some initial problems with the police being inflexible.

Q: How about the consulates? How did you find supporting them, dealing with them and their usefulness?

GEISEL: Well, most of them were very good, especially the big ones because you had very senior officers, some of whom should have been ambassadors or maybe were going to be ambassadors who were running them. Without exception all of the CGs (Consul

Generals) and most of their officers spoke very good German and had very good relations with the lander.

Q: That is the equivalent to the states.

GEISEL: Yes, the states that they were accredited to. They always felt, with the exception of Berlin, that they were neglected by the embassy and I think to some extent they were and I went around and visited them all and made the point that I had been a consul general myself and I was going to see that they were well treated, which they were. We had a bit of a problem with Stuttgart because I think that was our smallest, that was another one sort of like Naples where they were rattling around in this huge building. In fact, I think they closed Stuttgart, didn't they?

Q: I believe they have at some point.

GEISEL: Yes. But our consulates were happy. By and large our people lived well. And of course remember that in those times, before Unification especially, Bonn was a pretty sleepy place and most of the people who were at our constituent posts were much happier to be there than to be in Bonn.

Q: Yes. It was not a place that would attract people.

GEISEL: Well, it was a very pleasant place, quiet, but there wasn't much to do. You had this huge American presence, you know, we had- not only did we have a food store, we had a department store, we had snack bars, we had barber shop, we had a Stars and Stripes book store. My wife had our second child in Bonn and our little girl, our eldest daughter was still quite young and she went to the American Embassy nursery school and then she went to kindergarten at the Bonn American School, which was run jointly by the Department of Defense and the Embassy. We had a lovely house along the Rhine and apartments for staff, and they were in beautiful condition and they were spacious, especially the ones that were renovated, also all along the Rhine. So people had a very pleasant life. We had the only church owned by the U.S. Government on our property. But if you gave me the choice between living in Berlin and living in Bonn or living in Munich or living in Bonn I would have been to Munich or Berlin in a heartbeat.

Q: Yes. One almost sort of plus thing for Bonn was, wasn't it, that there was a very active student leftist movement in Germany. You know, they get out, put masks on and have marches and all that. But I would think that Bonn was just not a place where anyone would bother to go to.

GEISEL: That's right, that's right. Even though we had a big university in Bonn, where my father actually graduated from law school. But no, except for the Gulf War, I don't remember any demonstrations. It was sleepy old Bonn.

Q: Tell me, how did the cataclysmic event of, was it November-December of '89, wasn't it, when the Berlin Wall came down? You were there, weren't you?

GEISEL: Of course I was there.

Q: How did that hit?

GEISEL: Well, let's talk a little bit about it because hopefully some other people will say the same thing that I'm going to say and just reinforce it. We had one year of Rick Burt and then he left to be replaced by Dick Walters, a man who I absolutely adored; I adored and respected, he's just one of the finest human beings I've ever known in the Foreign Service. The first time I met him I said what do you want to be called, general or ambassador? And he said well, they're both good titles, either one is fine with me. Then he called me in to his office the first day that he got to Bonn, he had to see me right away, and I was all set for a complaint about his household effects or that I hadn't gotten the residence fixed up the way he liked it or that he needed something added to the office and it was none of that. The very first thing he spoke to me he said, look. You're the admin guy and I have to tell you something that's important to me. Whenever there's someone in the hospital, I want to know about it right away so I can visit them. And he told a story about how he had, when he was acting director of the CIA, he was at a conference and people had timidly interrupted him because they said could you please sign this, this man is dying at a hospital in Gettysburg and it's an award we want to give him before he dies. And Walters said no, I won't. Get me a chopper; I want to go see him. And that was one of his big things, if you were in the hospital, he dropped everything and he wanted to see you. Now, everyone appreciated it except some of the wives who were a little embarrassed, they were pregnant and they were just about to deliver a child or had just delivered a child and in walks Ambassador Walters. The gesture was so appreciated and what a difference between him and his predecessor.
Then the next thing he said to me, he said, now Harry, I like money as well as the next guy but if you're ever unsure whether to rule for the embassy or rule for me, always rule for the embassy. Now, that was an admin officer's dream. And I would have done anything for that man.

So let's go then to your question about the fall of the Berlin Wall. You know, when was it, starting in July of '89 various East Germans were jumping over the fences of West Germans embassies behind the Iron Curtain?

Q: Particularly in Czechoslovakia.

GEISEL: Czechoslovakia I remember, that's right.

Q: And Hungary.

GEISEL: Hungary they walked across the border, yes.

Q: They were leaving like mad.

GEISEL: Yes, yes. And the world was changing. Now, what was interesting is that, in September, Ambassador Walters sent out a message saying that he could see German unification within five years and this got out, I don't think he made any secret of it, and the press asked Jim Baker about it and he said I think Ambassador Walters is ahead of the band. Well, the hell he was. Interestingly enough our embassy in Berlin, that is the embassy in East Berlin, which is something we have to complete because I helped open that, helped create it in 1974-75 and forgot to mention it when I was in EUREX but anyway, the ambassador there, Dick Barkley, sent a message saying it would take at least 25 years because the German, the East Germans and the West Germans thought in completely different ways. Now as a result of course, after two years, Dick Barkley for getting it wrong but getting it the way Jim Baker wanted was rewarded with ambassador to Ankara and Dick Walters was told to retire to make way for Bob Kimmitt, who was also a great ambassador but that's still and all, it shows you what happens if you predict something different from what the Secretary of State has predicted.

Q: I interviewed Dick Barkley and he said in the spring of '89 he was in the garden of East German, Berlin with his wife and he said you know, it's nice being ambassador but God this place is dull.

GEISEL: Well Dick is an old friend and I can see where, you know, look, an ambassador is talking to mostly high level officials, high level people from, you know, the people who are something in the country. I mean, he's hopefully getting stuff through his other officers from lower down in society but you know, the embassy in East Berlin got it totally wrong.

Q: Well of course the thing, to be fair with embassies anywhere and that is that so much depends at a certain point the East German government had to have lost its nerve.

GEISEL: Exactly.

Q: I mean, it was ready to clamp down and you know, to fact, you know, start shooting and it didn't.

GEISEL: Yes, and that was, I think to a large extent because they knew they weren't going to get support that they had always expected to get in the past from the Soviet Union.

Q: The Soviets had cast them aside. So it was something that nobody, I mean, very few people got right.

GEISEL: Well I mean, even Walters, if you will, said he could see it within five years. Five years, it wasn't a year.

Q: Yes. Anyway, how did it hit you?

GEISEL: Well, I certainly didn't really see it coming. We had a conference for the principal officers and the embassy minister counselors, in Berlin two weeks before the Wall came down. And you know, we talked about, you know, the tensions building up but if you were to have said to me, Harry, what do you think the odds are that the Wall is coming down? I mean the Wall didn't literally come down but you know what I meant, they opened it up, the Wall is coming down in two weeks, I would have said well, you know, that's pretty ambitious. And then boom, it happened. Well, we had a very good DCM; I hope you've interviewed him already, George Ward?

Q: Yes, I've interviewed George.

GEISEL: Well, he probably told you a great deal about Berlin 2000, which was his plan and I say his, he usually says it was "Harry's and my plan". Nonsense. It was his and I helped him. And from when the Wall came down we made the correct assumption, even though a lot of people said it wouldn't happen, that the embassy would move to Berlin by 2000. And we started planning for what that embassy should look like. And we made the point that a lot of agencies shouldn't move to Berlin, that, you know, there was too much admin and that those agencies should move to Frankfurt and a lot of the support should move to Frankfurt and that is what has happened. And we started planning for merging the embassy in East Berlin with the mission in West Berlin and that of course happened very, very quickly. I remember going, I think it was in December of '89, to Berlin, just a few weeks after this had happened and going to the embassy in East Berlin and there was Dick Barkley literally at the door because he was saying goodbye to someone who was visiting him and he said, ah, Harry, you've come to inspect your new plantation, have you? And it went very fast because basically we didn't want the Department to get it wrong. The Germans helped us; I'm looking at this from an admin point of view because they announced that when unification came there would no longer be missions in Berlin, all the foreign presences there would have to be accredited in a different way. I mean, when we were a mission we were accredited to ourselves because Berlin, as you know, was ruled by the three allied powers in the West and the Soviet Union in the East, although the Soviets said that they had turned over all their powers to the East German government which, when we talk about setting up our embassy in East Berlin we can talk about. But thanks to the Germans' demand that there would be no more missions in Berlin, we went to the Department, we said look, whether you like it or not the Germans say there is going to be one diplomatic presence in Berlin as of October 1, 1990, and we've got to figure out what it is. So now you know. Those are big secrets. It's one thing when you're talking about spying and all these other things but when you're talking about which Americans are going to stay in Berlin and which ones aren't and who's going to get what title in one section, you better believe we had to treat that as" top secret." And we met in the tank in West Berlin, I think it was in the West or was it in the East? No, I think it was in the West and it was I and the Berlin DCM who was wonderful, a guy named JD Bindenagel.

Q: I've interviewed JD.

GEISEL: Oh good. Well, he's great, he's a great guy. And then Harry Gilmore. You've done him already?

Q: I have done Harry.

GEISEL: Great. Harry was the minister, of course, in the West. And it was always the three of us with sometimes other people being brought in and I think George might have come for one meeting.

Q: George Ward.

GEISEL: George Ward, yes. And we did a staffing pattern and the Department second guessed it but of course ultimately the Department couldn't get its act together, especially Personnel as it was called in those days and we just sent them a message from Walters near the end saying well, what are you going to do? And they did nothing. And then the last day, as you would expect, they came back saying embassy was authorized to implement the proposal in Bonn telegram such and such and we did and the announcements went out to the posts in Germany and to the German foreign office.

Q: Well you know, looking at this, you're breaking an awful lot of rice bowls when you're-

GEISEL: You can't begin to imagine. I mean, just think of the Berlin budget, which was tens of millions of dollars, which all went away.

Q: And then you've got these people who had lived on the banks of the Rhine in Bad Godesburg-

GEISEL: Exactly.

Q: -you know, I mean, they were, they might have been American citizens but they had put down real roots and all of a sudden- how did you all deal with it?

GEISEL: Well, keep in mind of course that the Germans themselves were improvising as they went along because they weren't sure, you now, originally- Well, first of all, it wasn't until they had a vote, a nationwide vote, that it was decided that the capital would be moved to Berlin. But then of course the Germans being the good compromisers that they are for things like this, left different pieces in Bonn to keep some employment going. The best example was of course their social security office which had been put in Berlin to create employment but of course was occupying far too much housing and everything so that was moved to Bonn.

Q: Yes, the Germans were working hard to sort of stack the deck to keep people in Berlin.

GEISEL: Yes, well to keep people in Berlin, to keep people in Bonn.

Q: There had been an exodus, you know, early on.

GEISEL: Early on, exactly.

Q: So they were putting stuff in to keep people.

GEISEL: Oh yes, it was all jobs for the boys in the old days when the wall was up and that's why, frankly, they were so generous to the allies and never bothered us, really, on budget matters, because, you know, if we built some Golden Greek Temple housing well, that was in a way fine because that created jobs and they didn't have to run that by anybody really, they said well the occupiers have insisted on this. So yes, that's right. And then all of a sudden they found they were going to be short of housing and they wanted to keep the people in Bonn happy. Remember that it was a Christian Democratic government and that Bonn is a Christian Democratic stronghold.

Q: That's where Adenauer had his roots.

GEISEL: Yes. Adenauer was 28 kilometers away in Cologne; he was mayor of Cologne during the Hitler time.

Q: Well I mean, did you immediately in your plan for 2000 look to building a new embassy?

GEISEL: Oh yes. And there was only one place to build a new embassy too, and that was of course where the old embassy was, on Pariser Platz. And the British are doing the same, they had the same, and I think the French were there too if I'm not mistaken. And of course this was very hard and the Germans did a number on us, they didn't mean to but they did, when we thought we would pay for most everything by selling a big, 14 acre radio transmitter site that we called RIAS, Radio in the American Sector, which was hopelessly antiquated and which we didn't need anyway, and it was worth a fortune except nobody had realized that somehow, it was after I left, some Berlin bureaucrat had declared it a green zone. So I don't know if the Germans ever ended up giving us compensation for that or not but that certainly made a mess and we thought we wouldn't even have to go to Congress to ask for the money because we had statutory authority to reprogram proceeds of sale. But that was for another day.

One of the issues was housing. How are we going to get all this housing in a very expensive city? Well there we came up with what I think was a really nifty proposal and the Germans helped us on that. Basically the Germans allowed us to trade our housing in Bonn for housing in Berlin. Well, how do you do that since the Germans have a law similar to ours, that it must be relatively equal value and the properties in Berlin were worth much more. These were properties that we had been occupying under the occupation. Well, we came up with something, I'll take credit for coming up with it although I think my successor says that he did but, one day the records will all be open and it will be shown that in Berlin 2000 we had spoken of it, we came up with a concept that we had known from our days in Frankfurt of usufruct and actually from our chancery

in Bonn. U-S-U-F-R-U-C-T. And it means all of the privileges of ownership without the ownership.

Q: Like a lease.

GEISEL: It's like a lease but you can do anything. Tear buildings down, put new ones up, modify them, but it is a lease for a certain time. So what we did is we offered to trade the property which we had in fee simple, which is in full title, in Bonn, for a 99 year lease of the properties in Berlin with the right to renew the lease for another 99 years. There of course is where Don Hayes came in because he's the guy who did the negotiating along with some people from what was then called FBO. But the concept was an old one. Most importantly, the Germans wanted to do it. We're talking at the highest level and Chancellor Kohl basically told Walters that he was interested in helping us and that he would find a way to make this move happen and the Germans did help us.

Q: Well did you use the impending move to Berlin as a way to clean out the Bonn stables? I mean, you know, all these organizations, or were they too well entrenched?

GEISEL: Well, that really was after my time. In Berlin 2000 we certainly made plans but neither I nor George Ward can take much credit for that, which was really Don Hayes and Beth Jones who worked that through, I think with some success. There were some strange things going on. The Office of Defense Cooperation gave some of its German employees up through secret clearances. Well, one of those employees turned out to be a spy for the Stasi, which of course we discovered when we, well when the German Federal Government got hold of those Stasi archives, we also found that we had spies in West Berlin. We found that, unsurprisingly enough, I think everybody except one FSN in the East were Stasi spies. I'm not even sure about that one. So going back to what you said, because of the spy issue, because of the moving issue, I won't go so far as to say that we cleaned house but certainly we kept a lot of people who were questionable from moving to Embassy Berlin. I can't say "we;" that was our successors who I think did a wonderful job.

Q: Was part of your plan, I would imagine, to put something into, Leipzig or someplace? You almost had to do that.

GEISEL: Well Leipzig actually happened before the wall came down and boy, was it tough getting the East Germans to agree on a consulate office and getting us housing; they'd given us horrific housing. They gave us a pretty good office, I've forgotten what kind of building, it was a conference center or something of that sort that they ran since they had all the property. Yes, sure, of course we had to be in Leipzig. I forgot who the first CG was but he was great and gave us some terrific reporting, actually much better than, I won't say better but it was very, very good reporting.

Q: Well Leipzig was the center where they were having these candlelight ceremonies every Monday or Sunday or whatever it was, much more than and not in East Berlin, and

they kept these ceremonies, they were just quiet but they were bigger and bigger and bigger.

GEISEL: Exactly, exactly. Yes. You know, Leipzig Consulate General in those days, it was tiny. I think we had three officers if I remember right. I don't even know if they were all officers but three Americans at first and they were just actually what the Secretary is now talking about with these small posts that she wants to have all over the world and that's what we had in Leipzig, a hostile area. We had wonderful reporting, our CG was waving the flag and as I say, he really was given a rough time by the East Germans in terms of support but we had wonderful information coming from him. So, there he was when the people were marching down the street.

Q: What about, how did you find, did you have much workings with say the Brits, the French and the others in Bonn?

GEISEL: Oh yes, yes, very much so. We were very, well not so much with the French, as you can imagine but with the Brits all the time. And I loved working with them. It was different in Berlin but part of it was that the Germans appreciated the fact that we did not rip them off as badly as the British did, let alone the French. The French at one time were trying to haul as many recruits as they could through Berlin and they would then have the Germans buy all their uniforms. The Brits apparently in their day had ordered polo ponies. Now funnily enough, when I'd been there awhile and we had a new general commanding, not so long before the Wall came down, this idiot wanted polo ponies for himself and we said no. He may not have called them polo ponies, they may just have been riding horses or something and we said that would be very embarrassing.

Now that reminds me, of course we profited mightily from the fact that we were at least marginally restrained compared to the British and French in Berlin because the question came what to do with all of the furniture that we had in Berlin because it all belonged to the Germans, it all had been bought with occupation funds. You know, we're talking about a big crowd there. Now, it was especially of a concern in the ambassador's residence because the ambassador had a second residence in Berlin and although FBO, thank goodness, owned that residence, the residence in West Berlin, the Germans owned the furniture and we had bought some beautiful pieces in the old days, as you can imagine, including some real antiques. I bring this up just as an aside; the question was how to get the Germans to sell it to us at a price that we could afford to pay. Well, there again the Germans wanted to be helpful to us and we were very quick about it unlike the British and the French and as soon as we could, what would you do for the Germans? We gave them an inventory. We gave them a detailed inventory. I forgot how many hundreds and hundreds of pages long it was and of course we depreciated the heck out of everything including the antiques. Then we offered to pay the Germans the "book value." Well, I believe it was 680 pages or something like that. The Germans were delighted. So I think we paid, if I'm not mistaken, either $25- or $50,000 for all the furniture in the ambassador's residence in Berlin and it was worth considerably more.

Q: This is tape four, side one with Harry Geisel. Yes.

GEISEL: Okay. So what happened with the British and French? They were dilly dallying and didn't get their act together and the Germans did the same thing that our bureaucrats would have done; they hired consultants to do inventories, the British and the French inventories. Well of course the consultants' goal was to make the stuff look like it was worth a fortune.

Q: Sure. Because they took a percentage of it.

GEISEL: They took a percent or at least they took some glory; whatever the arrangements were made. Our arrangements were all done, we cut the checks. In fact hurray for EUREX, which went to bat for us with the Department to get all the money, realizing what a deal we had gotten and how, if we didn't move quickly the Germans would get smart. Although there again as you said to me while the tape wasn't running, hey, we gave the German bureaucrats what they wanted, we gave a list of, even if it was not entirely realistic, that was 600 pages long and what auditor would go through it all?

Q: Sure, they can act on this, they didn't have to- And again, it wasn't coming out of their particular pocket.

GEISEL: Exactly, exactly. It was found money for them. But in any event, you asked about how the British and the French and we dealt together, we and the British worked very well together. You know, I'm wondering if I ever even met my French counterpart other than at cocktail party or two and I don't think I did.

Q: Did you have many dealings with the American military?

GEISEL: Oh yes.

Q: How did that essentially work out, other than the polo ponies?

GEISEL: Well, that was the American military in Berlin and as I said, the American military in Berlin, by the time I got there, my predecessor Dick Bowers had beaten them over the head enough that they really realized that the embassy was important and that they did have to work through the Berlin budget office and, other than the polo ponies, we got on very well. There were instances where we had to say no and really mean it but very rarely. Just shortly after I came, a very difficult commander, a two star general who thought he was especially close to God left and he was replaced by a one star who was a great guy, special forces guy, a guy would started as a displaced person in a concentration camp and, after the war, came as a refugee to America, enlisted in the army as a private and ended up as a major general and a Green Beret, a fantastic guy, so, no issues there. There were two types of military at the embassy. There were those who were part of the defense attaché office and the ODC, I think it was called, who were military assistants, if you will, more advisors, since we didn't assist the Germans, and maybe a handful of other people who were part of the embassy and accredited to the Germany foreign office

as diplomats, if you will, as military attaches and assistant attaches. And then there were people who were actually under the command of Heidelberg where the-

Q: Seventh Army?

GEISEL: Seventh Army was, yes. Everyone worked very well together in Bonn. I can't think of any-

Q: Did you have, I mean, you know, I'm thinking of the FBI, DEA, Treasury and then on and on?

GEISEL: Oh yes, this was on and on and they were overstaffed but they were very nice and many of them were German speakers who'd been in Germany many times before and who worked with people in the defense ministry in Bonn, which is why they were there. Of course the commander of the U.S. Army Europe, USAEUR, had a representative office at the embassy. I can't think of any problems in all the time we were there.

Now, I'll just mention something that could never exist anywhere else. You would see German military officers walking around the embassy with embassy FSN IDs. Can you imagine that? Well, they had a unit, I think they were either 100 strong or 200 strong; I think they were about 100 strong in the embassy working for the Defense Attaché Office as a special office; they were doing photo interpreting of East Germany, you know, from our satellites. Our defense attaché would pass these photos to the Germans and because of the sensitivity of it all, the work had to be done in the embassy so there were all these German officers and I suppose some non-coms in uniform around the embassy. I think there were at least 90. Can you imagine that? Wearing FSN badges.

Q: Did you have any, I mean, prior to the collapse of the East Germany government but even afterwards, how about the spy business? Because from what I gather, I mean, every other German in West Germany, you know, at least Mr. Wolfe had a wonderful organization going.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: And did that, I mean, did it happen before the Wall came down?

GEISEL: No, after.

Q: But after it came down, I mean, was there sort of revelations?

GEISEL: Oh yes, but as I mentioned earlier, most of that came about after I left in '92. Some of it had come out and DS, I think, reacted very well and very quickly and there were amazing things. Like I'd mentioned, this one FSN who'd been working forever for the military in Bonn, who was apparently one of their biggest spies, and that did come out before I left. And I believe that, in fact I'm sure the Germans actually tried her as a spy

and she was given some jail time, I don't remember how much. But I know we found she had actually stolen some information on Patriot missiles. It all came out in the press.

Q: What about the Gulf War? You were mentioning that.

GEISEL: That was a very tough time for our community. We were very scared and it turned out we had good reason to be worried. And we improvised. We depended on the Germans for protection and at first they weren't giving it to us but of course they were no match for us in public relations. I remember all of our people were upset because they saw there was no increase in security. So, I until the Germans had some cameramen around the American school; I don't know whether we tipped them off or whether we just knew they were there, and then we called all the children out, closed the school down, had them march in front of the German cameras and we announced that we weren't reopening the school until the Germans gave us police protection, which they had told us they didn't have the manpower to do it. They cursed me and we had protection the next day. Then the Germans were terrific, you know. It was just a matter of breaking through the bureaucracy which tends to say no, this is different and we can't do it and once you reached a higher level the answer was of course we'll do it. So, within two days they gave us fantastic security around both the chancery and the housing compound and they were serious and they were good. I can't say that was the end of our worries because, as you may remember, ultimately someone from the Red Army Faction stood across the river and fired an AK-47 or maybe even it was a heavier caliber weapon, I think it was actually a heavier caliber weapon into the embassy chancery, which was really little more than cardboard, it was just, I mean, it wasn't cardboard but you know what I mean, the bullets went right through, but they shot the place up after we'd closed for the day, I think it was 6:30 at night and they aimed high at first. I remember our econ counselor, Don Kursch, was there and he ducked, so no one was hurt. But there were, I think, 80 some odd bullets, they were heavy caliber bullets now that I think of it; broke a lot of windows and went through a lot of walls.

Q: Were there a lot of third country nationals in Germany at the time?

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Did we hire them?

GEISEL: Well, we hired them legally, but yes, yes, yes. Oh yes, especially in the jobs that the Germans didn't want to do. Hey, we didn't invent that with Mexicans. They were picking up the garbage. Not as much in Berlin for garbage- not as much, I should say in Bonn as far as garbage was concerned, had mostly Germans there but we had a lot working in admin, some Turks, mostly Filipinos. And the Germans would occasionally harass us about them but in those days there was pretty full employment so you know, it was the sort of thing that the Germans would call me in and I would say a few nice things and give them papers to justify what we were doing and then they would leave us alone for awhile until they felt the political pressure to question us again.

Q: Well were you seeing in Germany any sort of results of, I'm not sure if this is the right term, social engineering, but the safety net, the vacations, the-

GEISEL: Oh sure.

Q: I mean, from an American perspective, did this seem to be sort of an inhibitor to Germany or not?

GEISEL: Well sure. And we would feel some of it at the embassy where, you know, some of the goof offs would get notes from their doctor that they needed a rest cure at Baden-Baden, you know, and that this should be charged to sick leave. And to some extent we put up with it. Now of course as you know, that nonsense has today bankrupted the German health system and now they're trying to reform it. Yes, we would see it and it was obvious that the Germans were going to get in deep trouble because a labor hour in Germany with all the benefits was already, I believe, the highest in the world. Now, to some extent, of course, they made it up because they're good engineers. Now they have over 10 percent unemployment there.

Q: Right. Well then, this probably is a good place to stop, I think, Harry. You left Bonn in '92.

GEISEL: Yes, and I left for Moscow and I think that's a good place to end. And I'll just say how I went to Moscow and why I went to Moscow and then we could call it quits unless you want to talk about Germany for maybe 10 minutes in 1974 when I forgot to do it.

Q: Okay.

GEISEL: But in any event, I was, by this time, really looking forward, my assignment was up in '92 and I was really looking forward to going back to the States because I hadn't had a real job in the United States since 1973 to '75 in EUR post management. When I was doing this roving throughout Africa, I was really in Africa most of the time even though it was counted as a domestic assignment and I wanted to go back. One day I got a call from John Rogers, who was our undersecretary for management and he said Harry, we need you to go to Moscow. And I said huh? And he said well, Ambassador Strauss doesn't like the guy he has now and the guy is due out anyway and he wants you. And I said how did he even know about me? He said well, actually he was told by Jim Baker to get Pat Kennedy because Pat Kennedy was the best admin officer in the Foreign Service. I said yes, I agree with that. He said but Pat can't come. I said you mean Pat won't come. He said well, whatever, you're the next best. So I said I really had counted on going back to the United States, it's been so long, John. I knew John very well. And he said Harry, believe me, there aren't any jobs for you in the Department. And I thought to myself well, if the undersecretary of state for management is telling me that, I can take a hint. I have a philosophy, I would always rather have people say thank you to me than f--k you.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: So I said okay, John, I'll go to Moscow and he said oh, that's wonderful, Harry.

Q: Okay. So now, do you want to talk a bit about setting up our embassy in East Berlin?

GEISEL: Yes. And this can-

Q: In '74?

GEISEL: '74-'75. I'm sort of amazed at myself how I managed to miss that. My wife had mentioned it to me because I told her what I was doing and she said oh, you must have told them all about Berlin. And I said yes, of course I did, when the Wall came down. She said no, when you helped set up the embassy. I said oh, I forgot about that.

Q: Okay.

GEISEL: We were given word in relatively early '74 that we would be opening up an embassy in East Berlin, an embassy to East Germany and that "to" is a important word as I'll come to, before the communist party celebrated its, what would it have been its 30th anniversary, in October of 1974 and Secretary Kissinger had correctly assumed that the East Germans would be quite desperate to get us to recognize them prior to that date. We went out first as a team that was headed by Nelson Ledsky and Joan Clark. Have you done them?

Q: I've done Ledsky, not Joan yet. Joan was done by someone else.

GEISEL: Oh, okay. Nelson doing the substantive work and Joan doing the administrative work and that was my introduction to what is called quite fondly "Berlinery." Have you heard that term?

Q: I've heard it, yes.

GEISEL: Berlinery means, as an example, we would talk about the proposed American embassy IN the Soviet sector, the proposed American embassy TO the German Democratic Republic in the Soviet controlled sector of East Berlin. The East Germans would come back with their language which was Berlin, Berlin Hauptstadt der DDR or Berlin, the capital, the American embassy in Berlin, capital of the German Democratic Republic, to which Nelson would immediately respond, "that is unacceptable language because the final status of Berlin has not yet been determined". It was all done, I would say, sometimes almost in good humor but quite seriously. The good humor would come in when we would talk about the former American embassy on Pariser Platz that was destroyed by the Russian artillery bombardment. They would come back and say the former American embassy on Pariser Platz which was destroyed by the American air bombardment. So everything that we did in the negotiations always had to consider Berlinery and indeed, we had to be sure we didn't make any mistakes.

So for instance, when I was ordering the seals for the embassy and for the consular section, we had seals for an entity that didn't exist. We had "Embassy of the United States of America Berlin, Germany." Berlin, Germany. There hadn't been a Berlin, Germany since the end of World War II.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: Then the seals that had to say that we were the Embassy of the United States of America, it would say "to", that was on stationery, the German Democratic Republic. You know, it was a way of preserving our rights. As I said, at least on our low end of the spectrum, we did it with good humor but basically, the problem we had is that someone had to set up this embassy overnight, we had to be ready to go but we couldn't go until we established relations because, you know, Kissinger was trying to get everything he could from the DDR.

We had an ambassador designate who wasn't designated and wasn't nominated, a wonderful man named John Sherman Cooper, the former senator from Kentucky, and in those days the greatest thing in politics was to be a liberal Republican, which is exactly what he was and everybody adored him. His wife, Lorraine, was the stepdaughter of Prince Orsini of Rome and she was a bit difficult but I got on very, very well with her. There were interesting problems, though. The Coopers had real money. They had four servants in Georgetown and they were taking their servants with them. Two of them were either Peruvian or Chilean ladies; one was the cook and one was the cleaner. The two men, Michael and Thomas, one was the butler and I don't know what the other did but they were, as we would say today, gay. No question about it. And when we were planning for the residence, they wanted to have a big bed and of course I had gone out of my way to see that there were twin beds and that they each had their own room. Now of course I knew at the end of the day it didn't matter once they got there, I just said, you know, this is a security issue; this is a communist country, as indeed it was. And funnily enough when I visited afterwards, Mrs. Cooper gave me tea and there was neither Michael nor Thomas to serve and I said Mrs. Cooper, where are my dear, dear friends, Michael and Thomas? And she just said, now, now Harry, not everyone can love you.

But we had another problem. We had the Department's director of funds management, as he was in those days, who came in to see me because I had been screaming for money. We had to buy everything; we had to buy furniture, we had to buy equipment, we had to get cars. You know, it was like starting an embassy but the embassy wasn't there yet. You know, it didn't even have an organization code. You know, all the bureaucratic things which we had in waiting, the files, everything, the people selected to go there. And he said, "I can't give you any money until I see a flag flying over the flagpole." And I said Walker, if you don't give me some money there is not going to be money to buy a flagpole. And ultimately, of course, Joan managed to whisper at a higher level to, you know, stop the nonsense, and get us the money. Bureaucrats are of different calibers and I found throughout my career that most of the bureaucrats in the department were good but some of them understood our basic mission better than others did.

Q: Okay. Well then, we'll pick this up next time. You're off to Moscow in when?

GEISEL: This was Moscow in the summer of 1992.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick this up in Moscow of 1992.

GEISEL: Great.

Q: Good.

Now, today is the 28th of July, 2006. Harry, Moscow, 1992. In the first place, did you speak Russian or did you have any Russian?

GEISEL: None. But before we do that I want to go back to Germany for just one little bit because I told you how the last year there I was working very hard with George Ward on Berlin 2000 but I never really bothered to speak much about Bob Kimmitt, who was my last ambassador, for less than a year but he had a big influence on me. I'm not speaking of Germany and my life in Germany per se because I think I covered that pretty well but as a Foreign Service officer I had never really worked for such a high powered, in the sense of both intellect and drive, political appointee before. Dick Walters was certainly high powered but Dick Walters was coming to the end of his career after being ambassador to the United Nations and I loved Dick Walters and I learned a lot from him. Most people who got pretty high in the Foreign Service had worked for a Bob Kimmitt before but I had not. And he taught me a lot of things that I wish I had learned earlier on. It was as little as we were not allowed to write any papers for him that were longer than a page-and-a-half and better still, if they were a page-and-a-quarter and they could have attachments but you had to tell him everything in a page-and-a-half. And of course anyone who's worked for seventh floor principals knows that's the way the seventh floor works, by and large. I didn't know that. Bob was a stickler for grammar; he was fanatic and that was very, very good for me. For example, you were never allowed to use the word "this" as a noun; it could only be used as an adjective. A very good lesson. But I also learned a lot from Bob watching his ability to work so very, very hard. I used to joke and say that Bob Kimmitt had a fantastic sense of priorities; the really important stuff had to be done right away and so did everything else. And it taught me a lot about how people at the high level political life actually think and work. I just wanted to mention that for anyone who happens to listen to what I'm saying. I have to doubt that Bob will go still higher. I mean, he's now deputy secretary of the treasury and I wouldn't be surprised if he ended up director of central intelligence one day or in the Negroponte job or something like that.

Q: I don't think I asked this question, but when you were looking at Berlin 2000 was there a thought of saying okay, our special relationship in Berlin is over, you know, things are changing, were we thinking of saying let's get this establishment down a bit?

GEISEL: Oh, there certainly were and what we did in Berlin 2000 and it's worked to some extent albeit not as well as the State Department people would have liked it to work, we asked right away what really has to be in Berlin and if it doesn't have to be in Berlin because it's not key to the bilateral relationship, where should it be? And most of the time we ended up with Frankfurt because we had quite a bit of property there and it turned out we got some more property and the name of the game in Europe is owning, and Western Europe certainly, well in most of Europe, is owning your own property because otherwise we just can't afford to be there. So the answer is yes and I think the result is that our footprint is a little smaller in Berlin than it would have been otherwise albeit not at all as small as I would have liked to have seen it. I don't know that we ever said hey, the special relationship is over; we're no longer going to be an occupying power. I mean, I'm sure we said it but I don't know that we pounded it hard enough. It's so hard to say because so much of our presence at U.S. embassies, as you know, is not Department of State.

Q: I know it.

Okay. Well, you're off to Moscow in '92.

GEISEL: Right.

Q: How did you prepare it and- well in the first place, you were there from when to when?

GEISEL: Well, I was actually only there, not counting visits and TDYs (Tour of Dutys), from I think it turned out to be August of 1992 to, would you believe, June of '93?

Q: Good heavens. Alright, well tell me, when you went there, what was sort of the administrative problem, I mean, issue?

GEISEL: Well let's say issue, that's a good word, and it's the "s" word, of course, security.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: Remember that less than a year, I don't think it was more than a year, year before we'd had that terrible fire at the chancery which made it uninhabitable and Russians had, the Russian KGB had penetrated everywhere. We used to joke about the silver suits because of the firemen who came pouring into the place. Now, the fire was not set by the Russians, it was an accident from our own people who I believe were working on some equipment in the elevator shaft but we have the Russian firemen and the ordinary firemen were wearing stuff that looked pretty unsophisticated and beaten down. Then there were, I forgot now whether we called them silver suits or shiny suits but that was magnificent equipment, newest of the new and it was obvious that they were the guys who were waiting for a fire, you know, literally must have been intelligence guys who one of their collateral duties was wait for the fire at the American Embassy. So

where did we go for the classified work? Congress gave us a lot of money and we went into what was called the "submarine" which was half of the underground parking that we had had for both official vehicles and personally owned vehicles of people who lived on the compound. And of course what that meant is personal vehicles had to somehow find parking on the street, which was not always easy. Those secure facilities were probably about the most soulless facilities I've ever seen outside of a prison, as I'm sure you can imagine, but they were safe.

Now, the compound at Moscow, of course, the NEC, as they called it, the new embassy compound, was supposed to be our housing, and these were townhouses for the big shots and apartments for everyone else, was supposed to be dominated by the chancery and of course it was. This was the chancery that we found was riddled with bugs. So here we were desperate for space. All of our unclassified activities, with the exception of consular work and USIA, were in townhouses on the compound. It was an awful mess; morale was crummy. Well, I shouldn't say that. Morale was crummy in terms of the way that people perceived support from the embassy. It was such an exciting time substantively, if you could imagine, in 1992; Yeltsin had just taken over as president of Russia on December 31, 1991, after the previous summer when we saw the tanks and all the rest and Gorbachev unable to do anything. Very, very exciting and of course we had just finished feeding an awful lot of hungry Russians for I guess it was two winters straight. So Russia was a broken place and they were really looking up to the Americans in those days so it was a heck of a time to be there.

But as you said, what were my problems? My problems all were with the "s" word, security. We had virtually no Foreign Service nationals at the time; they had all been fired because they were spies some years earlier or accused of being spies and I suspect most of them were, certainly under the Soviet Union as opposed to Russia.

Q: We all assumed, I mean, I served in Yugoslavia, I mean, we assumed that everybody was at least reporting.

GEISEL: Reporting, yes. Maybe not even highly motivated.

Q: But reporting.

GEISEL: Yes. Well, here is another thing that I saw that just really frosted me. It was the painted lines. On all of the admin type buildings there were red lines, yellow lines and green lines. And Russian employees, and we had a handful then, Russian employees who were all in green jumpsuits by the way; I mean, the indignity of it all, it was madness, could go freely where there were green lines, they had to be escorted where there were yellow lines and they couldn't go where there were red lines. I don't know who put up those lines but they were a bit bizarre. Now, I thought this was all a bunch of crap, pardon me, because who was doing the work? Two groups of people were doing the work. I'm talking about the unclassified work, the support work, the people who worked for me, by and large, except for, of course, the security officers. We had either what were contractors who were mostly young college graduates who were drivers and cleaners in

sensitive areas and translators and all sorts of things who worked for a contractor, Pacific Architects and Engineers, at great expense. But then the people doing the real scut work in the kitchens were Filipinos, they were mostly Filipinos who lived in Russia; there were a lot of medical students who apparently weren't very good medical students and I don't know what else. I used to get very indignant and I would always be telling off security and intelligence people and I would say, what makes you think that these Filipinos are any less likely to be coerced by the KGB than the Russians? I said if anything, they have more to lose because they have their money, they have their apartments, they have everything and many of them don't speak Russian, they're fish out of water, this was nonsense.

Now, one of my goals, which I succeeded in, was to get us many, many more Russian employees. And I felt that the Filipinos, nice as so many of them were and some of them are still there, were giving us a false sense of security because you know, you would see these guys and even though you weren't ever supposed to discuss classified things in unclassified areas everyone does it, or may even discuss things is not classified that is still- you put the various pieces together and you get something. So, I pushed hard and quickly to get rid of the uniforms, I pushed to get rid of the painted lines because this was all stuff that was giving us a false security and costing us a heck of a lot of money and I considered that to be money wasted.

Q: Well did you find, I mean, one of the things that's always concerned me is when you have something like a PA and E hiring people, I went through this in Vietnam, I saw the same group. You know, you, you hire people, especially college kids and all doing stuff, these are far more likely to get themselves into compromising positions. I mean, they don't take it seriously. It's better, and you don't get as much work out of them as you would a Russian citizen.

GEISEL: Well, the KGB was kind enough to have lots and lots of prostitutes at the Ukrania Hotel, which was the nearest hotel to us, and of course we had Bechtel working on fixing up the old, burned up chancery. The kids and the construction workers, yes, you know, it was a lot of money and I don't know that we got for our money what we should have.

Q: Well, showing how it is, it's déjà vu all over again. I interviewed somebody who was vice consul at our embassy in, first in Moscow and then, this is during World War II when they evacuated to Kuybyshev or something?

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: But they moved and went to Belonevostok. But he said it was very obvious, he was single at the time, he said we were essentially assigned young ladies. And if you were high ranking you got a ballerina. I said at his level, a vice consul, you got a circus acrobat, which sounded like a pretty good deal.

GEISEL: Yes, that's what I was thinking.

Q: But anyway, you know, this was like-

GEISEL: In the Soviet Union. It was Russia by the time I got there by a few months but it was still in many ways the Soviet Union.

So anyway, we spoke that security pervaded everything and my life was really, the way I looked at it, to get things done and highly respect security but not get stupid. I'll give you another example. Bob Strauss was our ambassador and I can go on and on and talk about him, I have all the time in the world for him. And he called me into his office one day and he said Harry, in this Texas twang, is your mama still alive? I said, why yes. And he said well, you know, I had this terrible thought. You know, your mama's going to visit you one day, isn't she? And I said oh, absolutely. And he said well, it's going to be on a Saturday afternoon and she's going to be walking out on the Arbot or something like that and she's going to fall and hurt herself and she's going to call the embassy. Or you know, maybe that Russian hospital's going to call the embassy and that Marine guard is going to pick up and he's not going to speak any Russian or maybe there's going to be a PA and E operator there and he's going to be overwhelmed by all the calls we get on the weekend and your poor mama's going to be in the hospital and you're not going to know where she is and don't you think we ought to do something about not having good telephone operator service? Well, that was typical Strauss and of course typical Strauss was absolutely right.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: And I thought and I thought and I thought what are the issues? And they were both security related. So the first issue is dialing in. And I knew that we could get what they called DID, which we have everywhere here and we take it for granted, Direct Inward Dialing, where you dial the exchange and then the last four digits are the extension. And that was an easy sale to the intelligence and security folks; they were delighted. Of course what it meant is that they didn't have to worry about, even though the operators, if you will, were cleared, people could still dial right in. They dialed in faster. Now then, the other thing of course Strauss wanted me to do was to get Russian-English speaking operators. I knew that I was going to have some trouble with the community but fortunately- when I say community of course I mean the intelligence community- fortunately we had some pretty smart people. And I went to the station chief and I said look, as part of the briefing we were told that all calls are listened to from I forgot where the building was, just outside. He said yes, that's right. And I said you feel very comfortable that that's so. He said absolutely, there's no question. And I said well then why do we have to have cleared telephone operators since the Russians are listening anyway? He agreed and we hired lots of English speaking Russian operators. Bless you, Bob Strauss, you got the telephones answered.

I found the money and I found the legality and we put in cable television into the compound so that everyone on the compound and embassy offices not in restricted areas could have CNN, which was very important. CNN, BBC, I forgot what else we got but it

made a heck of a difference. I mean, half the time we were seeing our own city on it and that's why we really had to have it and that's why Uncle Sam needed to pay for it.

I'll now digress and tell a story because it really isn't digressing but I mentioned CNN and here again this had a big influence on my future career in the Foreign Service. One night I was walking in to the DCM's office, actually it was charge at the time, Jim Collins, who later became our ambassador. And there again, a wonderful, wonderful person who was as knowledgeable as you could hope to have and with good sense, better than anyone. Jim was having a tremendous argument with a person at the NSC who later on went to State and because I like this person I'm not going to say who it was because she was being so stupid. But anyway, here is what was happening. On CNN you could see, was a new Moscow correspondent named Siobhan Darrow, who as far as I know is still on CNN but she was very, very new in Moscow in 1992. Now, the reason that she was on and no one else was is the bureau chief was a fellow named Steve Hurst, who I think may also still be on CNN, and the number two, who was another very knowledgeable person was a woman and I can't think of her name right now. The long and the short of it, which I didn't know then, I just knew they weren't there, was that the two of them were rumored to be having an affair and were out of Moscow. So Siobhan was on the scene with the camera and the mike and what was happening is that she was reporting that there was a virtual coup d'etat going on; troops were in the street, no one knew what was going on and it was all very scary. This lady at the National Security Council was badgering Jim, you know, what's going on? And Jim kept on saying nothing is going on, trust me, we know it, we know it. We sent a flash message this afternoon because all of the Western embassies were briefed together that tonight Yeltsin was going to crack down on, I don't know if it was the legislature or particular people or whatever, this was all absolutely in the cards, there was no danger, we were told all about it. We sent, I repeat, a flash telegram, you know, that's supposed to be war and peace. It didn't matter because this lady said but I see this, I'm watching it on CNN. And finally Jim got fed up and he said look. You're going to have to decide. Are you going to believe me or are you going to believe what you're seeing on CNN? Fortunately but just barely they accepted what our charge d'affaires, a tremendously knowledgeable and experienced and reasonable person said and this taught me a big lesson, you know. Boy, that image on TV, that picture conquers a State Department telegram hands down. The telegram was marked "secret" and probably "NODIS" and "flash" and all the rest and it didn't matter; nobody had read the damn telegram.

Q: You said you could go on and on about Ambassador Strauss. Go on and on about Ambassador Strauss.

GEISEL: Okay, okay. Here's a good one. I was distressed by how barren the submarine looked, or the near submarine, because the submarine itself where it was shielded enclosures, you couldn't put anything in but the ambassador and political section, other people had offices just outside of the submarine where, you know, you could sort of do business but you weren't supposed to talk about anything too classified but you could work on your classified documents, for example, you could type- no, you couldn't type your telegrams, that would be inside an enclosure. But you could read your traffic, for

example. And all the corridors there were just painted white and that was the end of it. As I said, they were not electronically sensitive areas because we assumed they were compromised. So I came up with the bright idea that in the interest of morale, at the end of the fiscal year, we ended up with money we didn't know what to do with except I knew what to do with it. I appointed a committee under the chairmanship of the cultural affairs officer to go out and buy art for the embassy. Because you had brilliant stuff; this was 1992, you had wonderful, wonderful stuff that you could get for 100 bucks, maybe at most 200 bucks a painting. Now, that changed fast, just in the time that I was there. But I forgot how many paintings we bought but we bought a lot of paintings and put them up, where we could, and everyone was in love with them and it made things so much better, as you can imagine.

Now, when Strauss got ready to leave, I'm skipping ahead but just because it's one of the better Strauss stories, he didn't even say he was leaving, but he called for me and he said I want to walk around the embassy with you, Harry. I knew he was up to something. And he said now, I'm so happy you bought this wonderful art and you know, let's walk and take a look at it. We walked around, he comes to one painting and he says you know, that's my favorite painting, Harry, I'd like to buy that from the embassy. I mean, this is typical admin officer problem. He said I'll pay you; I'll pay the embassy what the embassy paid. I said I can't do that, Mr. Ambassador. He said what do you mean? You're not losing anything. I said suppose that that painting for which we paid, I believe, $200, is worth $20,000? How can I sell it to you for $200? And he said have you got regulations? I said I sure as hell do. And if you want to buy it you'll have to buy it at an auction. He said okay, okay, I'll buy it at an auction. I said no, but I'm not putting it up at an auction, the only things we put on auction are the stuff that we don't need anymore. So he left it. I mean, he's the kind of guy who would. Except he didn't quite leave it. He said well, take me around and show me your favorite painting. So I took him around to show him a big, big, big painting that was, what do you call the style where it's all in dots?

Q: Pointillism.

GEISEL: Exactly.

Q: Seurat.

GEISEL: Yes. A huge one of a birch forest done actually as you could imagine by a guy who is not so much an artist as he was a set designer. And here's where the story gets good. He says that's the ugliest f'ing painting I've ever seen. Which he didn't really mean but, you know. Well, a few weeks later I walked into his office, I said, you know that ugly painting that you didn't like that I liked so much? He said yes. I said I bought it. He said you WHAT? I hadn't really planned to buy it. I said well here is the story and you can check it out. That was the only painting that we had that we hadn't bought. It was on consignment. The NBC reporter at the time was a guy named Bob Abernathy and his wife was a White Russian duchess or something like that or descended from them. Oh, Sheremetyevo, same name as the airport. She was sort of sponsoring artists and she had asked if we could put up some art on consignment as well. Now, it wasn't actually where

the owned stuff was, I think it was over by the cafeteria or something. And I liked it but I just did this to get at Strauss. So I bought it, I think for $150. The thing is huge. I had it framed for $13; you could do that in those days.

Another Strauss story is I came late one day into the enclosure; we were having a country team meeting. He looked up and he said, Harry, that is the ugliest f'ing suit I have ever seen anyone wear. So I said yes, I know, I bought it from your tailor and I paid half of what you paid. Because he had the identical suit and had worn it the day before. He was the kind of guy that you could do it with. I think he was a masterful ambassador; he was exactly what we needed at the time.

Q: Well, you know, I've interviewed him and I was very impressed also. How would you describe your relations and impressions of the Russian authorities you were dealing with in Moscow?

GEISEL: Excellent question. All admin people had the misfortune of having to deal what was called the UPDK, which in Russian stood for Office of Services to the Diplomatic Corps. And they had been around forever and at the time they were run by an Armenian crook.

Q: That's crook not cook.

GEISEL: It sure was crook, I should say. And these guys had been used to getting their way all the time, especially on property. I wined and dined them and chatted them up and tried to BS them as much as I could and a couple of guys I got vaguely friendly with but a) I didn't trust them, b) I assumed they all were or had been KGB types and they were, on a personal sense reasonably pleasant but in terms of my being able to do my job they made my job infinitely harder, especially when we had no choice and we had to use them for something.

Q: Well were things approaching the point where, you know, you're moving out of the Soviet era, I can go out on the open market and hire people or not?

GEISEL: Yes, yes. After we fired all the UPDK people, I guess it was in the earlier '90s, we got our own people. No doubt some of them were spies but I had that great blessing which my predecessors a couple times removed hadn't had. We could make our own mistakes.

Q: Did you find that given the atmosphere and the KGB influence and all, at the same time you were dealing with more Russians than probably anybody else in the embassy, that you were getting pretty good information of how to work the system from your people?

GEISEL: Yes. Well, it depended, because remember, almost by definition if we cleared these people, I mean cleared in the security sense such as it was, they probably didn't know how to work the system that well themselves. You know, many of them had been

teachers who weren't being paid. I would say we had a handful of people who were awfully good and did understand the system but it wasn't like a typical embassy where the admin people- admin Americans can sit back and to have these wonderful, wonderful FSNs who have been at the embassy forever-

Q: As in Bonn or something.

GEISEL: As in Bonn, exactly. I wonder now, you know, this is how many years later? Let's see, that was '93, let's say, and this is 2006? Thirteen years later? I wonder what's happening. One of the problems we had, which Jim Collins told me just the other day is not such a problem anymore, is American businesses were stealing our people as fast as we could bring them on because a) they were reasonably security cleared and b) they were trained in English and-

Q: And you could pay more and they-

GEISEL: They could pay far more, that's where- On average they used to steal our people and pay triple what we paid. Russians have gotten more expensive now and also a lot more are available and hopefully we still have some of the good people.

I heard a little while ago that one of the guys I liked the best was a guy who we hired as chief telephone operator and I heard he was still there and he was a wonderful, wonderful witty, very, very bright guy and we had the good sense to pay him well so he hadn't left.

Q: Did you have any problem with the Marine security guard?

GEISEL: Wasn't I lucky? I didn't. You know, I wasn't there long enough. But no, no Lonetree or anything even close to that. Remember that by then Russia was so swinging, there were so many foreigners there that they could find all the girlfriends they wanted who weren't Russians, even though I must say, you know, the first time I visited Russia was 1973, it was on a tourism thing when I was assigned to Norway. And when I came back in 1992, 19 years later, I said where did all these good lucking Russian girls come from? Of course they were always there but all of a sudden there were clothes to buy, there was makeup, there were Western magazines and I guess, you know, these were the daughters of the mothers that I wouldn't even waste my time looking at.

Q: I can recall the wives of Soviet diplomats up to a certain point all looked like Nina Khrushchev, you know, nice little babushkas but plump and with a wart on their-

GEISEL: Nose or anywhere.

Q: Yes. And then oh my God, all of a sudden the Russian diplomats started coming up with these svelte young ladies.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: I mean, you know, it was as though somebody pushed a button and they changed their production line.

GEISEL: It was remarkable. And of course this gets back to what I was saying before; that it was so exciting to be in Russia then. Look, it was hard, it was drab. I don't know that I ever worked as hard in my life, not even in Rome, not even in Africa as I did in Moscow; it was just one problem after another. Look, the admin minister counselor, whatever I was, had to invest not hours but days figuring out how to get gas for the vehicles because you'd either have feast or famine, you never knew what the price was. The whole place was wild.

Q: This was in a state that had one of the largest reserves in the world.

GEISEL: Absolutely. Now, what we ultimately did, and of course, the Russians were playing us and everyone off; all of a sudden there'd be these artificial scarcities, no stations would have gas. We would have drivers, when I got there, we had PA&E drivers who were always out looking for gas. Well, I said, this is crap. Why don't we have tanks on the compound? And they said FBO forbids it because of the fire and everything else. I said well, we've got to have them and I called up FBO and I said we're going to have tanks. Oh no, no, no, you can't. I said I'm not asking you, I'm telling you, we're going to have tanks. Now, if you want you can have someone come out and help us build them safely or you cannot. And you know, I said to you, on a telegram from Strauss, how shall we work this? So they helped us construct safe tanks and we had very strict procedures on filling up. We used to get our gas from ESSO in Finland and of course it cost a fortune but we had it. And hey, guess what? Within, I'd say, about three or four months the Russians stopped jerking us around on the gas because they knew we were going to get it under a diplomatic shipment from Finland

Q: Did you run across or get out or have any intimation, I mean, you had Moscow and St. Petersburg there, you know, these were cities and they were really going, and then going out into the countryside I'm told, you know, by people it's like going back into the 14th century. I ran across this in Yugoslavia-

GEISEL: Oh sure.

Q: -a couple decades before, you know.

GEISEL: There was the element of the Potemkin village, not so much in Moscow itself because Moscow was just becoming a real European city at breathtaking speed But no, absolutely. We'd take rides out in the country, then all of a sudden the roads would disintegrate before your eyes and you'd see these miserable little shops with nothing in them and the awful housing and all the rest and people dressed in one step from rags. Sure. But then all of a sudden you never knew what you were going to run into. You could run into a terrific dacha or whatever. The place was changing so fast.

Q: Did you have any problems with what people call the Russian mafia? I mean, there were the old guard sort of buying up all the stuff, I mean, they were getting Soviet apparatchiks who got in-

GEISEL: Well, look at Yukos or Khodorkovsky who bought Yukos for what Philip Hoffman who was the Washington Post bureau chief there said was probably about one cent on the dollar. He rigged the auction and for quite awhile there were all these foundations that were well paid by Khodorkovsky, bleeding and crying about how he was, victimized. I actually wrote a little story for an investment publication I write for and my title, which was changed by the editor, was "He Stole it, They Stole it Back". We didn't have many problems with the oligarchs and I take my hat off to the economic section because I think their reporting was very good, I think they got it right. Ken Yalowitz was the head in my day. Have you interviewed him yet?

Q: Who?

GEISEL: Ken, Kenneth Yalowitz. He ended up being ambassador in Belarus and Georgia.

Q: And where is he now?

GEISEL: I think he's retired, I'm pretty sure he's retired and he is a wonderful person and he had some great people working for him. We would have problems and occasionally we'd be warned off and told, you know, don't buy stuff there, the mafia runs it or watch out, you don't want to hire that firm, it's mafia. Or we had one case which happened after I left but I knew the chap. We had had a young man working in our economic section. He was originally PA&E, but he was a college grad who spoke great Russian and had his feet on the ground, really, for economics and we used him a lot and he ultimately left the embassy to go into business and he was murdered.

Q: What about crime?

GEISEL: We didn't experience much of it. You know, the bad guys were warned off, you know, stay away from the embassy, stay away from diplomats and they were smart enough to do it. The cops were pretty corrupt, especially the road traffic police but again, they would leave us alone if they would see it was diplomatic. So no, I certainly felt as safe in Moscow as I felt anywhere.
The gypsies had come. The same gypsies, I mean not literally the same. Well, who knows? Maybe they were. I remembered them with less than fondness from my Rome days when they would be up and down the Via Veneto with the little kids and their signs and ripping off tourists and occasionally ripping off embassy staff members.

Q: Pick pocketing.

GEISEL: Pickpockets were there and we were warned, especially around tourist sites like the circus, to be very, very careful. But certainly organized crime or real criminals, violent criminals especially no, I felt safer there than just about anywhere.

Q: How did you find the embassy community? I'm talking about all the embassies. During Soviet times, you know, this was, particularly embassies from the West-

GEISEL: All stuck together.

Q: -all stuck together.

GEISEL: That's right. And the Marine house was the hangout in those days. I remember going there in those days, you know.

Q: How was it at this point?

GEISEL: I would say we still had very good relations. Remember, schooling was an issue and the school, THE school in Moscow was the Anglo-American School, which was jointly run by the American embassy and the British embassy and we broke a lot of rules in those days that I hope we're still breaking today. The Russians didn't care. We accredited all the teachers as attaches and gave them some privileges and of course we had to find them housing.

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GEISEL: We used to get some terrific teachers at that school. We could get anything we wanted from our business communities because of course there was far more demand for places in that school than we had room after we took care of diplomats. We had a real pecking order but my counterpart, Jim Daly, the British admin minister counselor and I worked hand in glove to see that the embassies were recognized for their kindness by the business communities and they paid well. They were happy to pay. I mean, I had calls from very high level corporate officials saying you've got to get so-and-so's daughter a place, he won't stay in Moscow otherwise. This is vital to our business. I loved it.

Now, just as a funny aside, I ended up being ambassador in Mauritius a few years later and one day, of course I'd been tipped off, I was driving to a cocktail party, no, I dinner party that a friend was giving for us, and we watched for another car and we made sure we were behind that car and that car's passengers got out and it was the new British high commissioner and his wife. I'd been there about a year and of course that British high commissioner was Jim Daly, who was my friend in Moscow some years before.

Q: Well, you left fairly early.

GEISEL: I left in, well, I was recruited, and my God, in April I was a bit shocked. It was a two year tour because it was considered a real hardship in those days. They weren't sure, you know, the Democrats had come in, not that that had anything to do with me but

it was a new administration and various people knew me and I didn't even know that they knew me. I was told that I was wanted to be chief financial office and I was told to come back to be interviewed by Brian Atwood who was supposed to be undersecretary for management. You know, he was for I believe it was 11 days before he went to AID. And Brian interviewed me and he said no, I've got to have a diversity candidate in that job but I'd love you to be my executive assistant. Well, after my time with John Rogers I was not about to, I'd learned not to say no to the undersecretary of state for management. So I said sure and I went back to Moscow and I told my wife that this would be happening and she had the same mixed emotions that I had. We were terribly excited by Moscow but it was a drab place and it was a tough life and I was working dreadfully hard and I said it would be in my career interest to do this and we decided to take it. We then took a holiday down in South Africa and I got all these crazy calls from various people back at State while I was in South Africa and the long and the short of it, which they wouldn't say over the phone but it was that Atwood was not going to be M, it was going to be Dick Moose and somehow, when I finally found that out I said, well for God's sake, Moose was assistant secretary for Africa when I was in Bamako and when I had the AF roving administrative team. I know him, he knows me. Ah, he knows you, well please come. Then all of a sudden someone said well we've checked around and yes, you're still wanted to come back. So of course I came back to be executive assistant in M.

Q: Alright. You did this from '93 to?

GEISEL: To '94.

Q: In the first place, what were you doing?

GEISEL: Well, executive assistant to an undersecretary is always defined by the undersecretary and I would say the first thing that a good executive assistant would do is to act as really the senior advisor to someone who is a political appointee. You know, the wit and the wisdom of the building is to a greater or lesser extent and that person is also the paperwork manager of the office. In my case, I had wonderful people working for me and I was totally disinterested in the routine paperwork. What interested me were the issues. Now, Moose also used me for something else. He had me do all the disagreeable stuff, including meeting all the ambassadors and going to all the meetings that he didn't want to go to and that ate up a lot of my time. That was fine since I could give him a heads up if something came out of it. Some of it was great. I was the person who took care of Pamela Harriman and she was a person right out of history. It was fascinating.

Q: She was our ambassador to France.

GEISEL: Yes, aside to having been married to Averell Harriman, to say nothing of Churchill's son, yes. And, oh, I can't think of, a very famous playwright. And then she was mistress of first Gianni Agnelli, the Italian billionaire and then Elie de Rothschild. Or maybe I got it backwards; I forgot which one came first. But she was in her 70s and she had, as a book about her once said, arguably the greatest facelift in the history of the world. I thought she was a delight. I also got to be very friendly with Larry Lawrence.

Larry Lawrence became our ambassador to Switzerland and he was the guy who got buried in Arlington and then got unburied in Arlington.

Q: Somebody said, I think Mike Boorstein said he was the only person to be TDY to Arlington Cemetery. Or he claimed that he had been in the Merchant Marine during World War II and he hadn't.

GEISEL: He hadn't been and to skip ahead just a bit, Pat Kennedy and I were the guys who got him into Arlington. Because what had happened was that he died while he was ambassador to Switzerland, his wife came back and was in the White House and said she wanted him to be buried in Arlington to the president. Someone called up Togo West, who was the secretary of the army, and Togo West called up Pat Kennedy and I happened to be in the office when it happened because Pat was his contact because Pat did funerals and logistics in his capacity as Assistant Secretary for Administration. In any event he said to Pat, we want to do this but we've got to have a justification. Pat put his hand over the phone and asked me, Harry, do we have any? You know the Lawrences. Have we got any justification? I said, of course, it's easy. He was in the Merchant Marine in World War II, was even torpedoed off of Murmansk and was injured. Pat told this to Togo West and Togo West said he's in. And he was buried at Arlington, I was there, President Clinton spoke and then what was it, a year later, two years later? Whenever it was, the word came around, hey; he has no business being there. It had turned out that DS had discovered the inaccuracy during his security clearance review, if you remember-

Q: His security.

GEISEL: That it had been- well, they didn't say that he was lying, they said they couldn't verify his service but that they hadn't done anything because they said it didn't seem relevant to his ability to be an ambassador. But no, blame me.

Q: Well tell me, what-

GEISEL: If you were to ask me what was the issue that took more of my time than anything else, it was finding a way to rebuild securely the Moscow embassy, the new embassy. I suppose that's one of the reasons I was recruited out of Moscow. I went to a lot of meetings and these were meetings at the highest levels, including the director of Central Intelligence. Moose and I were taken out to the National Security Agency, NSA, at Fort Meade and given what they claimed was a very, very special briefing on their concerns and we were told about all sort of ways that we wouldn't believe that we could be listened to if we weren't careful. Afterwards they said to us, you know, we hope you understand you have been shown the crown jewels. When Moose and I were alone I said well, I think actually we were shown the crown princess's jewels. It took up a lot of my time and ultimately of course we did come up with a concept. Actually we'd been selling it to the Hill and to the intelligence community earlier under the first Bush administration; it was called Top Hat. What you had was the compromised portion of the building, you know, where we found bugs in the rebar and everything else; the compromised part of the building would have unclassified activities and local employees

only and then we would build a barrier, I forgot how the actually did it, I know at one time we were talking about glass bricks but I don't think it ended up with them because I don't think glass bricks could have supported it. Then we would have the classified part where everything, the bricks, the mortar the concrete, you name it, came from the States. This was very useful to my later negotiations with the Chinese over how to build an embassy in Beijing. There wasn't a grain of sand that didn't come in in what was essentially a diplomatic bag to build the secure part of the embassy.

Then there was the usual crisis after crisis, no money and all of that. There I take my hat off to Moose because money was so tight in '93 that USIA actually didn't take two junior officer classes. Moose, even though we were tight for money, you know, we stopped all senior performance pay. We took those two USIA classes of people who'd been hired by USIA and we brought them into State. We were very worried about money all the time.

Q: What was the reason for the money shortages?

GEISEL: Damned if I know. I suppose it's the usual thing, you get new directors of OMB and they're feeling their oats and they're making you miserable and the Hill was probably making us miserable too.

Q: I also, I don't think either Christopher or Albright were particularly good about-

GEISEL: Getting us money.

Q: Getting us money. In fact neither-

GEISEL: Unlike Powell.

Q: Yes, I mean, did you have the feeling that these two secretaries, I'm talking about Christopher and Albright, were disconnected from the administration of the Department?

GEISEL: Yes but we need to be fair to them. Although I had all the time in the world for Christopher. Look, if you're the Secretary of State, unless you deem it otherwise you are surrounded by a praetorian guard. The Praetorian Guard had a few people who you've brought in and a lot of very smart political officers, by and large political officers. They're protecting the secretary from these mundane things like admin, you know admin, yuck. Resources, yuck. So I don't blame the Secretaries as much as I blame the people, both career and non-career, who surround the Secretary and say he doesn't have the time to do this. It takes a Colin Powell who's gone up from a 2nd lieutenant to a 4 star general to know how important management, admin and resources are to fulfilling your mission.

Q: Could you talk a bit about Dick Moose?

GEISEL: Yes. Have you done him yet?

Q: I have.

GEISEL: Well, he is still a dear friend. He's also, as I always I say to him , crazy. He was totally devoted to the Foreign Service; he was a Foreign Service officer himself. He was then for many years on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff. He was an ardent Democrat. He had actually been for a few days what was then called deputy undersecretary for management under Jimmy Carter and asked to be moved to be assistant secretary for Africa. Moose is an incredibly smart guy but he can't prioritize his time, he's very, very disorganized and he can't organize his paperwork. He had a great sense of foreign policy priorities but if you were talking about resource priorities he would get bogged down. He also faced a lot of trouble. That was when Jesse Helms was yelling and screaming that AID and USIA ought to be merged and Al Gore was saying no, they shouldn't and ultimately Al Gore said okay you can have USIA but not AID because Brian Atwood was far too smart to stand for that and Joe Duffy wasn't.

Q: Yes. Well Joe Duffy comes across, people have talked about him, really didn't have any particular interest in the work he was doing.

GEISEL: I think it was more that Joe Duffy was totally lost and he had no rabbi, he had no big backers. I've just recently done a job for what is now IIP. Don't ask me what it stands for. It was the I bureau at USIA, but they're the people who in effect are the real public diplomacy between websites and speakers, very , very good people, the real heart of USIA and I don't know that they got much support from Duffy.

Q: Yes. Well then, with Moose, did he relate to the rest of the department or did you sort of have to or not have to but were you part of his connection?

GEISEL: He related very well at the undersecretary level except maybe with Peter Tarnoff. "Relating was not the issue. I think what did him in, I mean aside from his affair, was that he was disorganized. A brilliant guy but very disorganized. When you're fighting a bureaucracy or you're fighting for the bureaucracy it's a war out there and you have to devote all your brain power to beating the jerks down who are trying to keep you from doing what ought to be done.

Q: This is tape five, side one with Harry Geisel. Harry, this is not expose oral history, but even I pretty much unplugged, somehow or another, I think it was in the paper-

GEISEL: It was.

Q: - with Dick Moose, how does an affair affect a high ranking officer?

GEISEL: Well you have to remember it was well after my time. But I was very close to Moose in the next two jobs that I had and as a matter of fact when it broke I was in Mauritius. He and the lady involved were calling me up frantically because the inspectors were involved and they were trying to get ideas, you know, I told them off the bat that I wouldn't tell them anything I shouldn't tell them but I'd tell them how they work and what they do. Well, it wasn't the inspectors it was actually the investigators, what we call

criminal investigators, who were looking into the matter. I was almost the last guy that had known what was going on. I remember I was in Tel Aviv, when I was deputy assistant secretary for information management and I had a frantic call from him. He wanted my advice on whether this young woman, Jeannie Norris was her name, would be a good executive assistant. And he said, you know, she's civil service, what do you think? Jeannie Norris worked as the Embassy Residence Manager in Bonn, Germany. I didn't know what was really going on and I said she'd be a perfect choice for you, she'll keep you organized, not knowing that they already had something underway. I think she was the right person if he would have just behaved in a businesslike manner because she had great abilities. But that's life and I'll tell you what was interesting. The people who took it the hardest, God bless them, were the secretaries. It's not true today but the front office secretaries were both African American ladies, very serious Christian, middle aged, wonderful people and boy were they pissed off because I talked to them afterwards. They were pissed off, they were furious that this was going on in the office where they were working.

Q: Well, I mean, what happened? I mean, did this, was this something that in a way broke?

GEISEL: Yes, it broke.

Q: I mean, there are affairs and there are affairs.

GEISEL: Someone wrote a letter, if I remember correctly, again, it was after my time, thank God, someone wrote a letter I believe to OIG or in some way called on the hot line. OIG is Office of Inspector General. The case was then turned over to the criminal investigators.

Q: I think there were trips to Africa, too, weren't there?

GEISEL: Yes, yes, I vaguely remember.

Q: Together, I mean.

GEISEL: Yes, yes.

Q: I mean, this is-

GEISEL: I believe the IG (Inspector General) presented the case to Strobe Talbott, the deputy secretary, who spoke with the secretary and I think that one or the other, well obviously the secretary decided but, I think actually it was Strobe who told Dick it would be appreciated, it was near election time, if he resigned, which he did. And we suffered terribly because of his indiscretion because we got a horrible undersecretary for management afterwards.

Q: Who was that?

GEISEL: Bonnie Cohen. Who disliked the Foreign Service. Period. That's what all the people who worked for her told me. She just outright disliked those elite officers. But anyway, I'm just trying to think if there's anything else I want to tell you about my time in M and I don't think so. There were, you know, there was the usual putting out fires but here's what happened. Within a year Moose and I were very good friends but we were both pretty fed up with each other. He would be spending hours polishing a speech and I would be begging him to get to his routine but very important work. I was his executive assistant and should have had more respect for his priorities. It was time for me to go and Sherman Funk came in and made a request that I be made acting IG when he retired.

Q: He was the inspector general.

GEISEL: He was our first inspector general under the new inspector general act which was passed under Ronald Reagan.

Q: The idea being to put somebody in who was not Foreign Service.

GEISEL: That is correct.

Q: Sort of, as I think they called it, a junkyard dog.

GEISEL: That's what Sherman called it. He said his job was to be a junkyard dog. Now, the inspector general act did not require a non-Foreign Service type that was Jesse Helms who attached some legislation to something else that said a Foreign Service officer cannot be the IG. And after having served as the acting IG, I think that was one of the wisest things that Jesse Helms ever put into legislation because it's impossible for a Foreign Service type who's an honorable person to be IG when stuff is coming in over the transom about his friends.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: I had to disqualify myself a few times. I would sign papers, my counsel would say you know this person, you're going to sign this but you're just going to see the person's name but we're not briefing you on this. Then I would be out of it and I would designate someone else to receive the work and to brief the deputy secretary about it. It didn't happen too often but it happened.

Q: Well let's talk about-

GEISEL: Anyway, I didn't quite get to how I got to being the acting IG for a year. What happened is that Sherman decided to retire and he went to see Moose and he said, you know,, it's going to take forever to get a new IG and we have to have someone serious who we can trust. And he asked for me. Well I think Moose was ready to hug and kiss him, he was so pleased. I was ready to hug and kiss him, I was so pleased. Moose discussed it with the Secretary, the Secretary agreed and off I went in July of 1994 to be

the acting IG, thinking that it would probably be three or four months and it was instead 11 months.

Q: Alright. Well then this is '94 to '95?

GEISEL: Correct.

Q: What were, at the time you did it, what were the issues you were dealing with as IG?

GEISEL: Well, there are different strata because the IG has, of course, what I would call the routine inspections, which are basically to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of State and its missions. You then had audits, which were similar. You then had a new set up, which was security and intelligence oversight. Security and intelligence oversight was both audits and inspections but with people who had real expertise in the various aspects of security and intelligence. Then we had the tough guys who are the criminal investigators and we had I think it was either 31 or 33 trained law enforcement officers. They go down to the training center for all federal law enforcement officers except for FBI, which is somewhere in Georgia in the middle of nowhere, and they know how to take evidence, preserve evidence, they're armed when need be, they work extensively with the Department of Justice through the Counsel at OIG. Sherman put it best; he said if you're doing a good job, you're sitting on the barbed wire fence because you both are reporting to the secretary and to Congress. That's in the act. And it's tough. So the things that you always have are of course the issues of misfeasance and malfeasance.

Q: It strikes me having 30, you know, we're talking about a pretty small corps.

GEISEL: That's right.

Q: For one thing, we don't have a hell of a lot of money. I mean, I'm talking about, it sounds like you're putting up a dam for the Corps of Engineers or something and there isn't that much money to play with.

GEISEL: Right. Nowadays there is but there sure wasn't then. You're absolutely right.

Q: And it sounds like you're over gunned as far as-

GEISEL: No. Because it's not a matter of money. That was my impression too. It's not a matter of money, it's a matter of, I don't want to sound trite, but it's of honor and decency. You occasionally have people who are doing terrible things, whether it is stealing money, selling visas, ambassadors taking property and building themselves a summer home- not property as in ground but property as in lumber and electrical fixtures and all the rest and building themselves, as one of them did, a retirement home in the country where he was accredited. You have undue influence, you have adverse action.

I'll give you one thing which I know that people who read, if anyone ever reads this transcript will be interested in. Do you remember the case of Jean Kennedy Smith, our ambassador to Dublin?

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: Okay. Jean Kennedy Smith, one of the sisters, a sister of the president and of Robert Kennedy, was named ambassador to Ireland. And I received a, through SP, I believe, the policy people, a formal whistleblower complaint, that she was stifling dissent, because she was very pro IRA, she was bullying the-

Q: Consular section.

GEISEL: -the consular section, that's right. Her DCM was accused of being her toady and was leaning on these people. It appeared to be an appalling situation. So is that something that you would want the inspector general to get very involved with?

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: Well, that's what you had to do. I sent an ambassador out, I don't remember which one it was, accompanied by a criminal investigator. Because the criminal investigator was the tough guy, the tough cop and the ambassador was the nice guy, the distinguished guy who would listen and all of that. Things were completely out of hand and we did up a report very carefully and then, before going further, I think we were ready to send out a formal team, I went up and I briefed Secretary Christopher one on one, with only his executive assistant, Bob Bradtke, sitting in the room, and I told Christopher everything, and bless his heart, he looked at me and he said this is very tough, but you're doing the right thing and I'll back you up all the way.

Q: Yes. Well, what happened?

GEISEL: Oh, I had left by the time she left but I have no doubt she was advised to find a good reason to leave. That was it. I started working with her lawyers. Now, in the small world department, one of those lawyers, I can't think of his name now, in fact the lead lawyer, was with a very distinguished expensive firm, had been the advance man for a visit to Durban that Teddy Kennedy had taken a zillion years earlier and of course we recognized each other and it made it much easier to work with him too.

Q: Well how did you find, I mean, let's talk about sort of the, I won't say the garden variety because that's trivializing it too much but in my field visa selling. This seems, I mean, junior officers, not all so junior officers, I mean this is one of the, you know, pieces of whatever you want to call it, that an awful lot of people are interested in and can be very tempting, particularly in the Caribbean or in-

GEISEL: Why say particularly in the Caribbean? Say especially in the Caribbean and especially in the Philippines.

Q: Yes. And Philippines.

GEISEL: India maybe.

Q: But particularly those places. I was in Korea, South Korea.

GEISEL: Oh, there you go.

Q: Where I was consul general there, and you know, I mean, we were always putting out fires.

GEISEL: Yes, well you had a very, very, very well run section in Korea, which helped. But still, it's scary. Now, I wonder if today Diplomatic security does visa fraud but in my day it certainly was the office of inspector general because it was employee malfeasance. You usually end up hearing about this. Sometimes it's someone at post who turns them in, sometimes it's disgusted immigration lawyers, although usually it's the immigration lawyers who are doing the paying.

Q: Well they claim they paid and they didn't get served.

GEISEL:. We had the darnedest stuff. We had a case of a guy who was stealing, we had it on videotape, was stealing weapons that DS was sending in the pouch. This guy was somewhere along in the chain. We caught it in Washington, D.C.; it was in the classified pouch. We had him up for trial in Washington, in the federal court, and this guy's lawyer made a big deal out of him being a part-time preacher; we lost.

Q: Oh God.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Well what about-

GEISEL: We won most of the time, by the way, to be fair, especially if we could arrest the guy at Dulles Airport, because then it was the eastern district of Virginia and boy, those courts are tough. All the courts are tough, the prosecutors are tough; you don't want to be a defendant in the eastern district of Virginia if you can help it.

Q: What about, usually the visa selling and all, these are relatively, not always, low ranking Foreign Service officers.

GEISEL: Right, right.

Q: But what about political appointees? Because you've got some who come in with a very hazy notion of integrity.

GEISEL: Yes. I had a guy; I'm trying to think, oh yes, yes. In fact, I went out to counsel him, Moose asked me. As I said, Moose and I had wonderful relations, we used to eat lunch, oh I don't know if it was once a week or once every two weeks, because I viewed my role as IG as trying to do things of worth to the Department. I read every damn report they ever wrote that ever had my name on it and half of them were thrown out or significantly changed because they were just paperwork exercises. I had a sign on the door that had a chicken with little droppings underneath and a circle around it and a line through the chicken and then in Latin it said non excrementum galinae. I think you can figure that out; no chicken shit.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: And I tried to break my people of the habit of writing stuff for the sake of writing stuff. But to get back to ambassadors, that was tough. I remember we had an ambassador in Malta; he'd been ambassador to Providence, Rhode Island. That's a Freudian slip; mayor in Providence, Rhode Island. I don't remember whether we were tipped off or what but he was getting awfully close to the line. His mother had a travel agency. My God, I just remember now, we're having the same issue again with another ambassador or at least it's rumored that this is happening. His mother was advertising tours that included a night, not a night but a party in the ambassador's residence in Valletta, Malta. Well, that's pretty close. In that case Moose just asked me if I would just go out myself and talk to him because he said this is the kind of guy that if the inspector general comes out and just says you know, pull yourself back from that kind of issue. I went out and he did. He was a nice guy but needed guidance.

Q: Well did you find, you know, when Sherman Funk first came in actually I think people learned to respect Sherman Funk, whom I've interviewed but at the time there was quite a bit of worry because you know, I mean, he's-

GEISEL: A junkyard dog, he's independent, he's going to report to Jesse Helms, he's a Republican, which he was.

Q: Part of the concern was that the inspection, which generally, I think most of us kind of looked forward to-

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: -because the inspectors came around and said we've got a problem here, how do I solve it? You know. I mean, and maybe help clean up the files and all that. I mean that was the old inspection and some of the inspectors were kind of like traveling psychiatrists.

GEISEL: Absolutely.

Q: And that goes way back to 1906.

GEISEL: Absolutely.

Q: But when the new one came in the whole feeling was well here's a bunch of guys who are going to play gotcha. I mean, these are guys who are coming out to catch you on anything that you might have done and these are the people to be afraid of.

GEISEL: Do you know I think that that was not an unreasonable fear, Stu. But I think Sherman Funk, who was a wonderful person, another person who I'm still in touch with, Sherman quickly saw basically what a good bunch of folks the Foreign Service were and the problems that we had. He had come from agencies where there was much more money and he saw how we were starved for money, starved for positions and really harassed by the Hill and it didn't take him long before I think he was really running inspections like they were before but he didn't start out that way.

Q: Yes. This is the feeling. I mean, the initial reaction I remember picking that up.

GEISEL: Absolutely. Of course, we tend to be paranoid in the Foreign Service, with pretty good reason, quite often.

Q: Well, did you run across any sort of major problems that were going on? I mean, sex discriminations, sex harassment?

GEISEL: Yes. Now wait a minute, it all depends what you mean by major. Not major in the sense that they were endemic. But yes, absolutely.

Q: It was a period when sexual harassment was a term, I think, wasn't it?

GEISEL: Yes, exactly.

Q: It's died away now. I mean, not died away but then I think it was at its peak, wasn't it?

GEISEL: Well, sexual harassment was not at its peak but I think consciousness of sexual harassment was at its peak. I think it had actually gone down. We had some of that, not too much, thank God, but as I said, I had wonderful resources in OIG, I mean, when I mean wonderful resources I mean numbers of bodies and quite a few smart people and a lot of dedicated people. I also had a lot of idiots and they didn't understand that I didn't want them writing paper for the sake of writing paper. You saw this even before the Sherman Funk days where you know, you'd have 50 recommendations because they felt well, we're out at post three weeks, we've got to come up with something. That was a battle I didn't win but I tried to win, to get them to write serious stuff.

Look, I'll give you an example. Some jealous staffers on the Hill had gotten hold of some of our auditors and said you know, these people are living it up in housing the issue needs an audit. So they did an audit. And I said, now wait a minute. This is very interesting but the first thing is there are some falsehoods. You didn't tell lies but people told lies to you

because one of the things you came up with is how in some foreign services, Germany comes to mind, they had to pay for their housing overseas. And I said you know, that's true but they didn't tell you the second half. The second half is they don't pay income tax when they're overseas. And there were a few others that they mentioned and I said okay, you've been to Denmark, you've been to, I forgot where else; I said you're going to Moscow, you're going to Kazakhstan, you're going to Ivory Coast and you're going to Bonn, Germany, because I knew that Bonn did everything by the book in terms of housing, you've got only what you were entitled to but it was beautifully maintained housing. And I said forget about your report, it's not being published until you've done the rest but I promise you I'm not going to mess with you but I want you to see how the other half lives. So they went out to the hardship posts. They didn't go out to Moscow because of course Moscow considered itself to be the center of the universe and it didn't have time for the auditors. Fair enough; I would have pulled off the same thing in my old job there.

Q: If you could have gotten away with it.

GEISEL: Yes, if you could get away with It, you did it. In any event, they came back and boy, were their eyes opened and they wrote a reasonable and helpful report.

Q: Well did you have a problem with the people who went to Georgia and were trained as law enforcement types? Because you know, you come out of that and I mean-

GEISEL: Sure I had a problem.

Q: -everybody, you know, I mean, if you're a cop, you're a cop.

GEISEL: But you wanted a cop in those jobs. And where management came in, Stu, was to use the resources in the right manner and to sensitize these people. Very often, if it was not an open and shut case of criminality, I'd have the cop go out with an inspector, with a Foreign Service type, and we'd do it as what we called a joint inspection/investigation. Where it was clearly law breaking, well hell's bells, I wanted the cop there with his badge; he didn't usually take a gun with him but he had a badge. And you're damned right; I was quite happy if they badgered the people as long as the people all understood what their rights were and really understood what their rights were which I understand became a problem later on but I don't think we had that problem when I was there.

Q: Well I remember seeing things in the Foreign Service Journal; letters that came in that said watch it when you're dealing with these inspectors because these are not-

GEISEL: Investigators.

Q: Investigators. These are not your friends.

GEISEL: Absolutely right. The same way if you're in a hit and run case and the Arlington police come to your house they're not your friends either.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: No. I mean, you're right but you know, this was missing from AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) and by that time I was on to other things and I didn't want to fight all my friends but I disagreed. You know, look. You can't make nice. A long time earlier I had been involved, I think I mentioned it briefly on the tape, when I was doing this roving job in Africa and one of the things we had was corruption in a big way at our embassy in Pretoria. And we- this would have been 1980, it involved FSNs and Americans, not even an American, two Americans, and I saw the fake vouchers and some of the other things that were involved and we sent a message back to OIG, well, it wasn't OIG, I guess it was just S/IG if I remember right. They sent out a couple of inspectors and maybe an auditor. Well, between those two guys and there were two of us really, from my team, we so messed the damn thing up because we didn't know about the rules of evidence and we didn't know about this very important thing called chain of custody. It ended up that the one bad guy was still indicted and the FSNs were fired. He was indicted and he is still to this day a fugitive from justice. But when you're getting into law enforcement matters you better have some law enforcement people doing it.

Q: Well then, you did this until?

GEISEL: I did this until we actually had an IG confirmed.

Q: Where'd he come-?

GEISEL: She. Jacqueline Williams Bridgers came from GAO, what was then called the Government Accounting Office, and she had hoped I would stay on but Moose had another idea, he had another problem and he came to me and made a deal. The deal was that if I agreed to be deputy assistant secretary for information management, and it turned out the first chief information officer of the department, he would get me an embassy. Now, I was just lucky that his affair didn't break until after I had my embassy. But he gave me a list, he tempted me and I kept my mouth shut because I thought, wow. Imagine that. It's just like when I learned languages. The U.S. Government is paying me a nice salary so I can learn all about information technology.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: And I went off to be deputy assistant secretary for information management.

Q: You did that for how long?

GEISEL: I did that for a year and as soon as I was appointed, Moose had my embassy. I was approved by the D Committee, as it was called, and my name was sent to the White House and this was all kept quiet but I knew I was going to be an ambassador and I was doing this for the Department for a year.

Q: Well why don't we talk about that? Do we have time or shall we stop?

GEISEL: We have time; I'd love to.

Q: Okay, well why don't we talk about your information management?

GEISEL: Well that was also a very tough job because I didn't know very much. They hired me because, and they made it clear, I was hired because I was a good manager, not because I knew much about information technology. And I think I was very good as far as managing people and resources. I was not good and made some terrible mistakes with respect to information technology; although they didn't hurt the Department they could have hurt the Department and we were only lucky that they didn't. I also give myself credit for being one of the merry band of people that used to go out to ambassadors and tell them what they didn't want to hear about the Internet, that we were getting better information from the Internet than we were from their political sections. I didn't say it quite that baldly but I came close. And I loved to tell that story that I had told about my time in Moscow when CNN was taken much more seriously by Washington than the embassy in Moscow, which is arguably one of the finest embassies we have in the world.

Q: Well were you sitting there, this is what, '90-?

GEISEL: Let's see, '95-'96.

Q: This is the time Internet was beginning to come on-

GEISEL: Just beginning to catch on, that's right. It was still pretty slow, there was no Internet Explorer, we used, what was it we used? Mosaic.

Q: Mosaic, yes.

GEISEL: Yes. That was one tool, I forgot the other.

Q: Was there concern that in Foreign Service, I mean, a lot of people were basically rather computer illiterate, weren't they, at the higher ranks?

GEISEL: A, we were computer illiterate and B, our equipment was awful. Remember the Wangs?

Q: Wang, yes.

GEISEL: Which were the wonder of age when we put them in in the early '80s and we were ahead of all the government agencies.

Q: As a matter of fact, I was in Korea when we put some Wangs in there and this was the late '70s.

GEISEL: Yes. You went back to Korea later, didn't you?

Q: No, no.

GEISEL: Oh.

Q: But we may, in a way, made the wrong choice.

GEISEL: Well of course in 20/20 hindsight we did. We bought proprietary when we should have bought off the shelf.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: But how were we to know? I don't blame the people who did that then. But you know it was an interesting time because I can remember in the late '80s, early '90s when I was in Bonn and just then it had finally come that e-mail was more important than telegrams. Remember, and I mean telegrams today are nothing, they're just confirmations, telegrams are of very little import because everything is done by e-mail, both classified and unclassified. A I remember our unclassified system went down and in Bonn in those days we had a regional communications office with all the technicians and I talked to them and I said you know, where's the problem? They said well the problem is a, I think it was a server, which was located in Antwerp. Now, why did we have a server in Antwerp that was controlling Europe? Well it was simple. Because way back when in 1975, when no one was using e-mail, the European logistical support office was set up in Antwerp.

Are we still going?

Q: Oh yes, we're still going.

GEISEL: Okay.

The European logistical support office was set up in Antwerp and they didn't want to use telegrams, they and the transportation people in Washington. So that was the first e-mail, and there was a line, a dedicated line between Antwerp and the department and they were our hub, if you can imagine that. Well the server had gone down and he told me, the head of the regional office of communications, that they had a technician going up to do some work in the comm center setting up something for our mission to the Common Market in Brussels and, when he got done with that in a few days, they'd be able to work on the e-mail server. And I said what do you mean? You don't understand what's important. Nobody has their damn e-mail in Western Europe. But you know, it hadn't occurred to him. And he said oh, oh, you know, of course Harry, you know. But yes, times were changing and boy were they changing fast.

Q: Well were you sensing an awful lot of nervousness about this new way of communicating?

GEISEL: Oh sure. It's the old, old story. Look, let's go back a few years earlier when fax machines came out. I remember a telegram, this would have been sometime in the '80s, I suppose, when they were the wonder of the age. Wonders of the communications age tend not to last very long. I remember a telegram from the Executive Secretary of the Department to all posts warning us not to accept any instructions that were given by fax, that instructions should only come via official telegram, and it was to all ambassadors. Well, do you think it was even two years when S/S wasn't itself using faxes for just about everything and they still- they have this fax thing that goes to the White House, I forgot what they call it. You know, this happens fast and the same thing with e-mail and the Internet. And I got the big picture right. Where I was very wrong is that I was sucked in by a three star general in the Pentagon to believing in what they called DMS, Defense Messaging System. They still don't have it. And thank God after I left, my successor, Joe Lake, said this is bunk. DOD had only spent its first billion; it hadn't spent its second billion with this system that didn't work. And Joe Lake very correctly specified off the shelf and that's what we have today.

Q: Yes. Did you find a difference- did you find sort of the old guard and the older Foreign Service officers sort of a bit, and yourself included, a bit, you know, suspicious or at least uncomfortable with the things that were changing and the new generation coming out who could speak computerese and all?

GEISEL: Yes and no except I was not one of those guys like that. I was go, go, go, go, go. I want to learn, this is great. I did it because I've always considered myself to be a businessman aside from being a diplomat, aside from being a manger and I saw this was the future. There Moose was helpful because Moose always was quite visionary about it and we saw what was available on the Internet even from the beginning. Moose said this is the death of political officers.

Q: Well I mean, for example-

GEISEL: And it was the death of political reporting not, thank God, of political officers, because they still have diplomacy to do.

Q: Well the old thing of sitting down with the local newspaper and reading it, I mean the desk officer can read the paper too.

GEISEL: Well online and nowadays most of your serious newspapers around the world, because of their desire for influence, come out with English editions.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: On the Internet.

Q: Was this happening while you were doing this or not?

GEISEL: A little early, a little early but it was coming and there were enough visionary people who saw it coming. But you're right, by and large, there was this big dichotomy, you know, between the young people who got it and the older people who didn't get it.

Q: How about hiring? Were you able to be competitive and get good people?

GEISEL: Well, that was a problem but we solved the problem, unfortunately, the way that the department solves most of its problems, just hire contractors and pay them more.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: You know, it would be so much more efficient to have these people as employees but, that's a vestige of a bygone era when you could have government employees doing most of the work of the government.

Q: Well the security people must have been very uncomfortable with this.

GEISEL: Highly uncomfortable, you're correct. Many, many, many battles there and that was something that consumed a lot of Moose's time and my time. And there, of course, Moose was on the right side in the right way.

Q: On these battles, I mean, I would think that security concerns would sort of trump anything else.

GEISEL: Well absolutely. And that's why you had to go to these people and say yes, we understand everything that you're saying, now find a way to get us what we want that's secure too. Just a matter of putting the monkey back on their back, you know. Showing them that you respect them, which we did, because you know, a good cop, a good security officer, a good information security specialist is keeping you out of what could be terrible trouble. So no, it's a serious business and we always respected them but, they weren't going to stop us from doing our job; their deal was to help us do our job.

Q: Well then you left there in '90-

GEISEL: '96.

Q: To go off to Mauritius.

GEISEL: To go off to Mauritius, Delicious Mauritius.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop.

GEISEL: Absolutely.

Q: Today is the 7th of August, 2006.

Mauritius. How did you get Mauritius?

GEISEL: I got Mauritius because it was promised to me if I agreed to be the Department's first chief information officer. Well, Mauritius wasn't promised to me; what was promised to me, I was given a list and I was told to pick three posts from that list and the posts that I picked were Nicosia, Windhoek and Mauritius. Nicosia was my first choice but then Ken Brill, for no fault of his own but just the chemistry didn't work, was the executive secretary and Christopher didn't want him to stay on and he chose Nicosia, luckily for me because I realized later I'd gotten the better of that deal. The understanding was, of course, I think it's been around for a long time, if you have a high job on the seventh floor and your principal doesn't want you and it's not that you're bad, you're very well taken care of and I think that's the way it should be because among other things it encourages the seventh floor Praetorian guard to be very honest with their principals.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: In any event, Ken took Nicosia and then I got serious about Mauritius and it was perfect because my wife's family, mother and father, were still in Durban, South Africa, and it's only three-and-a-half hours away by plane. It was absolutely ideal. And of course as I later discovered Mauritius was a tropical island paradise.

Q: Okay. What did you find out- okay, let's talk about, in the first place, what was Mauritius, what was the state of Mauritius and then what were American interests there?

GEISEL: Excellent question. And I should make two other points. I always was, luckily for me, non-resident ambassador to Seychelles and to Comoros and therein hangs a tale as well, which we'll get to.

Q: We'll get to. That's the, yes.

GEISEL: But the first thing that's interesting was that when I did this roving all over Africa, I went to Mauritius at least twice as a roving administrative officer, fixing the post up. They didn't really need much fixing up because they had some superb FSNs. But in any event when I went to Mauritius16 years earlier, it was a pretty poor place. The first time I went, which would have been probably 1980, it was the damnedest thing. There was a line four miles long waiting to get into the U.S. Embassy. The reason was that someone had spread a rumor that the U.S. Embassy would give unlimited immigration visas to the United States and it was actually picked up by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation. In those days it was such a poor place that they had a department of emigration to encourage people to leave the island and this famous Swedish social scientist, well I guess he was an economist of sorts, named Malthus, who was sort of full of it, hatched up this theory that was based on Mauritius. The theory was that eventually people in countries with a high birth rate would overwhelm the land and they would starve and Mauritius was what he had in mind.

So when I got there the first time it was lovely but poor. And they did something though that was very smart in between when I went there in 1980 and I came back in 1996. What they did was when Maggie Thatcher agreed to turn back Hong Kong to the Chinese the then, I don't remember if it was the finance minister or the prime minister, went off to Hong Kong with a suitcase full of Mauritius passports and he told the rich Chinese that he met no, you can't buy Mauritian citizenship but, if you invest in Mauritius, you can become a Mauritian citizen. And some very, very rich Chinese built textile factories. By the time I got to Mauritius, it's the damnedest thing, here it is a tropical island, and they were the world's number two manufacturer of sweaters. The tallest building in 1980 was Rogers House, the American embassy was on that fourth floor. When I came back they had quasi skyscrapers 30 stories tall and it was an island that was so prosperous that they rated its living standards with Spain or Portugal or even Ireland. I think Ireland was an exaggeration but Spain or Portugal was probably true. It was capitalistic and democratic and everyone adored it by the time I came back.

Now if White House Personnel would have had its act together, I never would have gotten it and I note that I have since been followed by two real estate gazillionaires, one Democratic and then one Republican and Mauritius will probably never go career again. The way it used to work was that there was an informal agreement between State and White House Personnel that there were two embassies; there was Mauritius and there was Seychelles and one would go career and the other would go political. But what the White House didn't realize is that, first of all, the political appointee to Seychelles had died and, secondly, we were closing our embassy in Seychelles because the US Air Force had decided to close its tracking station on the main island of Seychelles. By the time the White House had figured this out, the president had long since put a checkmark by my name and my name had been submitted to the Senate for my three countries.

Q: Now I know Mauritius at one point was quite important for us as a whaling port but I take it that this is no longer important to whalers.

GEISEL: Well actually, you're right. It was a refueling and victual ling station. Actually on its coat of arms it says the Star and the Key of the Indian Ocean because it is crucially located in the Indian Ocean if you don't happen to have a Suez Canal. Naturally, their shipping and transshipping business starting falling to hell as soon as the Suez Canal opened. Interesting enough, we established relations with Mauritius and sent a commercial agent there in 1790.

Q: Okay so, anyway, Mauritius was one of the first posts we opened because of our ships.

GEISEL: Our ships. We had a hell of a lot more ships going, U.S. flagged ships going through in the 18th century than we did in the 20th century.

Q: Oh absolutely.

GEISEL: In the 19th century, plenty more. And I think they kept it open until 1911 or 1912 and then reopened it just before it got its independence.

Q: When did it become independent?

GEISEL: Well independent in the sense of being a self governing, what do they call it, country I guess, within the commonwealth was 1967. And then they became a republic around 1987 but still within the British Commonwealth.

Q: Well how British and how sort of residual French was it?

GEISEL: Well it was more, in many ways it was more, culturally, residually French than British but governmentally it was much more British. When the British came in the Napoleonic wars and overthrew the French, just as luck would have it, they had a very reasonable minded army of occupation and very high class people who were much more interested in playing polo and horse racing than oppressing the French who really could have used a bit of oppression because they were pretty arrogant. They let the French planters do their thing and in return the French planters left the British alone as far as government was concerned but the French kept their slaves much longer than they should have and they blackmailed the British into buying them out when they finally insisted on freeing the slaves. But the majority population group was Indian Hindus who came originally as cane cutters but there were about 17 or 18 percent Indian Muslims who were originally Gujaratis and traders who sold to the Indians. Mauritius actually was named after a Dutch prince because the Dutch discovered it, slaughtered all the Dodo birds because that's the only place the Dodo ever was and didn't think they could do anything else and left. The French came later in the, let's say that would have been the early 18th century, and grew sugar. They imported slaves. The slaves didn't like cutting cane and ultimately were replaced by Indian coolies when the slaves were freed. I use the word coolies because that's what they were called. There were, I think, it must have been about 25, 30 percent of the island were what were called Creoles, which were the descendants of the slaves who, by the late 20th century, were thoroughly mixed but they were the largest bunch of Christians on the island. The island even had an old Catholic Cardinal so you really had an incredible mixture of cultures with the Muslim culture, the Hindu culture, the Creole culture; then you had the French planters who dominated business, along with the Chinese. The French were about one percent of the population but they lived a very nice life by and two percent of the island were the Chinese, who also had come earlier as coolies but who were brilliant businessmen and were called the Jews of Mauritius because there were no Jews on Mauritius except for me and maybe 10 or 12 other people. In the second World War the British had deported a couple lots of Jews who had shown up in Palestine on some rinky boats and they had sent them to a fortress, a prison fortress in Mauritius and enough of them died that I would always say, not counting the tourists, there were far more dead Jews on Mauritius than live.

Q: 1996. What were American interests in Mauritius?

GEISEL: Well, twofold. First and above all else from my point of view were commercial interests. This was a prosperous place; we wanted to sell them everything from airplanes to cell phones. And unlike most places in Africa they paid cash and they had some good

businesses on the island. We also had an interest, as one would expect, in having them allow ship visits and the usual business about getting them to vote our way in the United Nations. We had very few tourists, very few American tourists there.

Q: When you say ship visits you mean?

GEISEL: I mean U.S. Naval ship visits. And I was able to convince the government to allow them to return. They had come to Mauritius often, in fact the Mauritians never forgot when they had a terrible hurricane and they had many, many terrible hurricanes there; we were right in the middle of what we called Hurricane Alley. The John F. Kennedy, a large aircraft carrier had been nearby and they had literally put the island back together again. But for various reasons, there hadn't been ship visits for many years and I was able to get them to come back, and they still do come as far as I know.

Q: Well when you got there what were the politics? I mean, you-

GEISEL: The politics have never changed on Mauritius. And you have to remember, like so many islands, the people on the island think that politically they are the center of the universe. There were essentially three political parties. The one political party which usually dominates and is at the moment again in command, it was there when I was there, was headed by the son of the first prime minister, Dr. Ramgoolam. They really represented what I would say were lower class Hindu interests, lower class and middle class Hindu interests. And the politics were very racially charged. Everyone gets along but when it comes time to voting, people usually vote for people that look like they do.

Q: Where did they fall? Because you know, you've got a couple of influences going, the French influence is sort of the left wing Socialists, the British with the Fabian Socialists, you know.

GEISEL: Yes. You've got it exactly right but by the time I got there, the biggest influence by far was India, which shows how the world had changed because, when I visited the first time, India was in not much shape to influence anything. I used to joke, but I was actually serious, and say that the British, American and French ambassadors were at the top but that the- well of course it was British high commissioner but that at the apex, the top of the top was the Indian high commissioner and the Indian high commissioner was intimately involved in local politics and as a matter of fact the man who was the first Indian high commissioner while I was there is now the number two man at the Indian foreign ministry, he's their permanent secretary.

Q: Well what was India, India of course has been changing too, so by the time, we're talking about India was no longer sort of-

GEISEL: A left wing basket case.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: No, exactly.

Q: India was changing.

GEISEL: Dramatically. India and Mauritius have a tax treaty which is very favorable to Mauritius and as a result any foreign investor who wants to set up a country in India is going to set up a Mauritian company. There was a good business for the Mauritian accounting firms setting up businesses for Mauritian companies for Americans who would then be able to invest in India and get their money out much more easily than if they were had Indian subsidiaries.

Q: Well what was your embassy like?

GEISEL: Our embassy was one of the smallest embassies in the world and it made me so happy. We were on the top floor of what had become a small office building but the rest of the building was occupied by the biggest conglomerate on the island so it was still economically right in the center of everything as far as the island was concerned. We had, let's see, an ambassador, a DCM, a junior officer; I think it's the finest junior officer job in the world who was political, economic, consular, political/military, commercial, you name it. I mean, real vestige of a bygone era in the Foreign Service. Then there was an admin officer, my secretary and a communicator and a public affairs officer and then an FSN staff, many of whom remembered me from my visits there in 1980s.

Q: Okay. Well now, when you got there was there anything to do?

GEISEL: Oh, that's a wonderful question. Well, I've seen it all over Africa. There are endless things to do. A better question would be was there anything very worthwhile to do? Because the endless things you do is you play the fact that you're the American ambassador and if you're smart you go to every damn event that comes up so that people are grateful and they owe you. I learned that when I was consul general in Durban. All you have really to give these people, because we weren't giving them any money other than a miserable little self help fund, is your presence but they love that, especially on an island like Mauritius. So I went to endless affairs. My predecessor quite correctly told me that I could spend three years there and never have a meal at home, not breakfast, lunch or dinner, if I wanted it. So I got to know as many people as I could from all of the population groups; I started working like a demon to push a big cell phone contract that we wanted. The embassy was administratively in very, very good shape; I had a wonderful staff.

Q: Did you keep your hands off the administrative officer?

GEISEL: I certainly did and I was berated by, and correctly berated by my DCM for taking such a hands off attitude because the admin officer wasn't all that good and was eventually booted out of the Service from what I subsequently heard. Or maybe she wasn't, maybe it was her husband who got booted out. Well one or the other did and both of them are gone but I was determined to have nothing to do with admin because I

thought, my God, if I had been an admin officer I couldn't think of a bigger nightmare than having Harry Geisel as my ambassador. I used to tell myself that every day when to hold myself back. Now, when that admin officer left, we were supposed to get another chap, second tour officer who sounded absolutely terrific who'd just finished a consular tour in London and his wife who was Swiss thought that Mauritius was much too wild and savage a place and insisted that he leave the Service rather than go to Mauritius and go to Switzerland instead. So for almost a year we had no admin officer and when I called up AFEX to complain, the response was you can be your own admin officer, Harry, and they were right, of course. Eventually they sent me a guy who was terrible, on temporary duty, and after he cursed out, literally, my best FSNs, I told him to get the hell off of my island. AFEX advised me that I wouldn't be seeing an admin officer for many months and I said that's just fine, I'm not going to see that guy after tomorrow. I had the pleasure of being my own admin officer for quite awhile.

Q: Talk about your dealing with the local officials.. I mean, did you have much to deal with them?

GEISEL: I had a lot to deal with them because they didn't have much to do either. I mean, idle hands are the devil's workshop and there were constant political intrigues but I could see the prime minister whenever I wanted to, I could see the foreign minister even more quickly because it was easier to get to his office. I would go in and ask for things and they would be very nice and promise me and of course, having had a lot of experience in Africa I realized that most of the time nothing would be done unless I kept coming back and that was fine.

I should stop right here and tell you about what was beyond question the toughest thing that I did and you'll appreciate it as a consular officer yourself. We had a terrible plane crash, a hijacked plane that crashed in the Comoros Islands while I was there and six Americans were killed. We had no representation on Comoros, of course, that was from us. We had a few people who we knew, including missionaries and we got information as quickly as we could. They were tracking the plane, it was an Ethiopian Airways plane, which tragically crashed just about a mile from the airport when it ran out of fuel.

They had no such things as coffins because they planted folks directly in the ground. So, wheeling and dealing with the French in Comoros, we were able to borrow a few coffins and I brought a coffin with my baggage, if you can imagine. It was a terrible business. The first thing that we did- the French, who dominated the islands, it was a former French colony, advised us that a number of injured Americans were going to be taken to La Reunion, which is this island near Mauritius that is a department of France now, it used to be a French colony. The first thing I did is I flew with the admin officer to the Reunion airport. The French military were very helpful and when the plane landed from Comoros, a French military plane with our injured people on it, I went to them, I interviewed them, the French being the French wanted the customs things done in French so I interpreted, none of the Americans who landed there spoke French. .Actually, I ended up interpreting for lots of other injured people that didn't speak French. It was just wonderful to see the relief in the injured people's faces when I introduced myself as the American ambassador

and then explained to them what was going on. The next day, I left for Comoros and there worked with the French, the Israelis who had lost six people and the Japanese who needed help and who also didn't speak French but who'd lost a whole bunch of people. The Comorian government was a farce, it was a dictatorship, it was- they were nice people but they were screamingly incompetent and corrupt to boot. The Department flew an aircraft, you know the plane that the counterterrorism people have, with Consular Affairs and FBI people and all the rest. Our public affairs officer had gone ahead of me and he was helping the Washington people by translating for them and showing them around.. In fact, virtually all of our embassy was out of Mauritius. But you know, it's events like that when you realize what a good thing it is to have a diplomatic presence all over the world.

I'll skip all the gruesome details except for one because this is well worth telling. We'd convinced the Comorans to set up a makeshift morgue in what was meatpacking plant because it was the only place that was cool. We were going to bring the bodies back to America, of course, in the coffins that I had either bought or brought with me and, fortunately and sadly, the Israelis are really experts at taking care of their people who get killed. Now the Jews don't do embalming but still the Israelis that came helped with very basic embalming and they asked us, they'd come on a small plane, could they put their bodies on our plane too because we had decided to stop in Nairobi on the way back where there was proper embalming available. Now, this is where it gets sad and interesting.

The Comorans were supposed to come with a truck to take the Israeli bodies and the American bodies from the meatpacking plant to the airport and we were then going to load them on our plane and go off to Nairobi. The truck doesn't come and the truck doesn't come. Finally it's the damnedest sight I saw in my entire career. Finally, up comes a dump truck and in that dump truck you see an orthodox rabbi bowing and praying and chanting over the bodies, the Israelis were in body bags, our people, including the wife of a Freetown FSN, were in coffins. What had happened is the Comorans had welched and they'd never brought a truck.. So the Israelis, being Israelis, had bribed a dump truck driver to stop and take the coffins and everything. They got to the airport and then the French, for whatever reason I can't imagine, refused to give us the conveyor belt which belonged to I guess Air France to load the plane. So we had to take the stairs, you know, these ordinary stairs that you push up to the airplane, take them, move them to the dump truck, jack them down and put the bodies in the coffins one by one on the stairs then push the stairs to the airplane hold and push the bodies into the hold.

Now, our security people were getting more and more nervous because the Israelis were doing their darnedest to poke all around the airplane. I mean, obviously the Israelis, some of the Israelis were from the Mossad and our security people wanted to get out as quickly as they could. However, there was a brigadier general in the NSC who was being very stubborn and he said you can't stop in Nairobi, it's a deviation from your flight plan, blah, blah, blah and Mary Ryan, the assistant secretary for consular affairs and the pilot, who was an Air Force reservist, came to me and they said we've got to get out. Mary,

may she rest in peace, was most worried about what really mattered-that the bodies were decomposing as the NSC bureaucrat did his thing.

Q: Was she on the phone or was she there?

GEISEL: No, she was there; she came out on the plane. The pilot was nervous, he was an Air Force captain, he didn't know what was going on and was very worried. So I did something I never did before and never did again. I said to the pilot, you tell that general that the American ambassador has told you to get the fuck off of his island now. No, I said actually to get the fuck out of his country right now. And he said yes sir, yes sir. And we did it. This was madness, it was bureaucratic madness. What really got to me, what was heartbreaking is that one of the people who was killed was a young woman, first tour CIA junior officer, a lovely girl, I had her effects, I had her wallet with her Virginia driver's license. The idea that these bodies were rotting because of some jerk general at the National Security Council was, well, that's why I said get the fuck out of my country. About two weeks later I got a call from Mary, Mary Ryan, saying that this general was making a great deal of trouble for the Air Force pilot and could I please confirm in writing what I had done. So I sent the whole story in and I sent it in I must say, rather matter of factly and of course, typical State Department, I had two calls from people saying my, my, this ambassadorship seems to have gone to your head, Harry. What else would you expect but second guessing? But that was fine, I'd do it again 50 times over.

Q: You might on this explain what was the hijacking about.

GEISEL: Oh, it was a couple nuts. It was nothing political at all, it was some goofy kids and they apparently didn't have more than fire axes and fire extinguishers and they seized control of the airplane and didn't even know where they wanted to go. That was what was so awful. These were Ethiopians; the plane had originated somewhere else, I forgot where, and it stopped in Addis and on Addis these youngsters, I think they were in their early 20s, had gotten on and seized control of it. I mean, that's what's so tragic. All of these things are tragic but this utter farce ended with most of the people being killed. One of the people who survived, one of the Americans, although he was hurt but we had him straightened out, was a fellow Foreign Service officer named Poncho Huddle, I don't know if you know him or have heard of him, he was, what was he? I know he ended up being charge in what was Rangoon. I forgot whether he was still a principal officer in one of the Indian posts, I don't remember which one. But it was awful.

Q: Well back to on Mauritius, did you find that the Indian government- did the Indian government have any politics that interfered with us there?

GEISEL: They interfered with the Mauritians, not with us. In fact, the high commissioner previous to me had bet on the wrong horse in the race and the Mauritians asked the Indian government to pull him back. I don't know what their agenda was; like us, an important part of their agenda was commercial because the Indians had lots of exports, they had banking but they just expected the Mauritians to follow their lead and the Mauritians were glad to.

Q: Did you have any dealing with the French?

GEISEL: Yes. You know, the French were really in many ways a vestige of a bygone era. The French embassy managed to sell a lot of products. I am personally convinced, although I don't think I could prove it, that many French companies came in and bribed, which was not hard to do. The Mauritian government was, I would say, at the middle end of venality; but not too venal. You couldn't give them money and then not deliver your product; you had to deliver the product too. I was waiting for the opportunity where an American company had been cheated, had won, had really fairly won a contract, should have won a contract for these container tractors in the terminal. Well, a consultant, a World Bank consultant who happened to be a Frenchman. had our people disqualified saying that they hadn't met the terms of what was required, which was unmitigated baloney. In my farewell interview with one of the newspapers I basically said that this was corruption pure and simple. Now, you know it's like everything else, you only fight a fight you can win and it is worth fighting and this was such a fight. I picked my fight carefully because the head of the cargo handling corporation, which was a government corporation, was extremely unpopular. He was known as Monsieur Macro, which is sort of French slang for pimp. In fact they even had a big cartoon in the newspaper when I did it, giving him a farewell souvenir. The government of course got terribly upset and so they asked me for my proof. I went in and I sort of implied that I didn't have much proof, that I just couldn't get the documents that I needed but they should trust me. The foreign minister said to me oh, what a pity, if you only had this proof we could do something. I said oh yes, I know. Then , half an hour later I came back, and said I found the documents. In between he'd already been to the newspaper saying, well, the ambassador doesn't really have any proof so we can't do anything. Then my successor told me that, sure enough, a U.S. company won the next contract because we just put them in a spot. Look, in the bigger picture what difference does it make? But as a matter of principle it's nice to teach these crooks that you can't get away with that with the U.S. Government.

Q: How did you find the American businesses that came there?

GEISEL: They were a mixed bag. A couple very good, very, very sharp outfits. I'll mention one in particular, they were the ones that won the cell phone contract, a company called Qualcom. They did everything right.

Q: This is tape six, side one with Harry Geisel. Yes.

GEISEL: Qualcom had a young woman as their representative. She was headquartered in Singapore; she was an electrical engineer and she could talk to the telephone company, she could talk to the government; absolutely competent, her head screwed on right. In fact, she had, heaven help her, peritonitis while she was on the island and she didn't skip a beat, she got operated on and came right back to business.

There were other American companies that were not serious and didn't do their homework. They hired consultants who they thought had political connections. Once a

bunch of them came from the States, they all flew in first class, they stayed at the most lavish hotel on the island and let me tell you, when I say lavish, lavish and Mauritius, the two of them go together, they accomplished really nothing. This woman told me Qualcom wouldn't even let her fly business class from Singapore unless she got special permission for every trip. She did not stay in a resort hotel; she stayed in the city hotel very near the government. It was very interesting to see and I always swore that I would never buy stock in that other company after I saw the way that they had goofed up on that contract.

Q: Was there a problem or was Mauritius prosperous enough so that there wasn't a problem that happens in so many places exploiting workers and all that?

GEISEL: Good question. Well of course remember we didn't really have any facilities on the island; we had agents on the island. All the manufacturing on the island was either textiles or sugar. The Mauritians actually on textiles had rudiments of what I would have to call a labor inspection service. They were pretty good about checking the factories for safe working conditions. For sugar it was not an issue because everybody, one way or another, knew the prime minister and other people so you really did not treat people badly. Look, it's not a wonderful life to cut sugarcane, it's a hell of a life but it was all mechanized really. In fact, that was the one brand the Mauritians, I mean, the average Mauritian thought it was French, didn't even know it was American that had the whole island sewed up and that was Caterpillar. The machine that was used to do the work digging up the cane and getting rid of all the boulders because it was all volcanic was the Caterpillar and they used to refer to it not as an excavator but they would say, a Caterpillar. Most of the generators were Caterpillars too. They really understood how to export.

When I was in Mauritius, there was literally a severe labor shortage in the textile factories and they had to import Chinese textile workers from the mainland and you could say they were exploited because they worked terribly hard hours but, relatively speaking they were well paid and it was clear, because I spoke to the Chinese ambassador about it, these people wanted to work. They wanted to work outrageous hours, they were virtually all young single women who wanted to make money and go back to China with a pocket full of bucks.

Q: Where did the Mauritians go for holidays? Did they go to France, the United States, England?

GEISEL: You said it; France, England and India, depending on their interests. We haven't spoken much about the English. The English had really, were not terribly important commercially. They had some agents and some interests but they had really let the business go over to the French. Of course the laws were English or at least English in origin and Mauritius by its own choice still looked to the Privy Council as the highest court of appeal. The British also had one other thing that upset the Mauritians and we were of course part of it and that was Diego Garcia, which are called now BIOT, the British Indian Ocean Territories. When Mauritius became independent, the British only

allowed them to become independent when they agreed that they would not make a claim for Diego Garcia. Now, I don't see how the Mauritians ever could have claimed Diego Garcia in the first place; it actually was first administered from Mauritius but then it was administered from Seychelles. In any event we very much wanted Diego Garcia, as we do today; you know, it's the permanent aircraft carrier on the way to the Arabian Peninsula and the arrangement was made that we would lease it from the British as long as we needed it. The people who were on the island who I think numbered a couple of thousand were forcibly expelled from the island for security reasons. The islands, the group of islands is called Chagos but the only island that is big enough to have a huge air base naval facility, which we have there, is Diego Garcia and there isn't a time that we aren't involved in the Middle East where a whole lot of the air activity doesn't take place from Diego Garcia. So in any event we and the British, well we leased it from the British, the British expelled the people who were there. The British told us to give the Mauritian government some money to help these people start over again. The Mauritians were very broke in those days, that was 1967; they kept the money, the refugees never saw any part of it. I think either one or two more times the British said please give them money. The last time the money actually went to a trust fund which helped those people somewhat. They're all Creoles. Interestingly enough just a few years ago a series of British court decisions essentially said that what had been done to the Chagosians was outrageous. It awarded them all British citizenship if they wanted it and of course including the right of abode in the UK. I don't know that so many of them have taken them up on it because, you know, do you really want to go to the UK and live on welfare? The Brits were afraid that they would all go off and live on welfare. You know, these were island people and all their descendants and it should have been done all along. But we certainly did our part when we gave whatever money the British told us to give them. They would like to go back and occasionally we've said you can come back to tend to the graves and whatnot. But it is a real security concern, obviously. The Mauritians would beat on me but I knew and I'd love to have some read this that what they really wanted was more money again.

By the way, what I do want to talk about, when you're ready for it, is I want to talk a bit about Seychelles and Comoros which were also my beat.

Q: Yes. Well just quickly, how about ship business? Why was there- what sort of talking did you have to do to get ship business in and how did they work out?

GEISEL: They worked out great. The first ship, which was a guided missile cruiser, didn't want to leave and the Mauritians didn't want them to leave because the Mauritians had forgotten how much money these sailors will spend in a place where they're happy. And here you had Mauritius, you had ATM machines, you had gorgeous hotels, you had very, very, very friendly people because the Mauritians are wonderful at tourists and no, the basic talking that I had to do to the Mauritians was easy because they had had Indian ship visits, they'd had a couple of South African ship visits and I said now let's be fair about it all and I said, furthermore, you're going to make a lot of money. They had one visit, our people were wonderful, we had absolutely no incidents whatsoever and the Mauritians said come back whenever you want.

Q: All you need is a carrier group.

GEISEL: Fortunately the harbor couldn't support it. Now, where it was trickier but, ultimately much more successful to have ship visits was the Seychelles because Mauritius was out of the way for our ships coming out of the Gulf. You know, they were doing this interdiction business in the Gulf, the blockade we had on Saddam, but Seychelles was very much en route and of course is a wonderful paradise but the Seychelles had a real policy of no U.S. ship visits.

Now, that brings me up to another point. Count on the U.S. military in its own way to not be sensitive as to how tiny a U.S. embassy could be. The military command that was responsible for Mauritius was the Pacific Command in Honolulu and they were also responsible for Comoros. But Central Command insisted on having responsibility for Seychelles. That happened just when I got there. So this junior officer, second tour junior officer, who was our political/military officer, had to deal with calls at all times from two military commands who couldn't understand why we couldn't just jump in and have another officer spend all day talking to them on the phone. In any event, I convinced the Seychelles, using the same logic as with the Mauritians, that they would make a lot of money. Seychelles has a lot of islands but it's a very tiny country, I think it's less than 30,000 people; tiny, beautiful islands. I convinced them that this would be real money which would really help, and they were especially broke at the moment and they agreed, and we just sent in one ship after another after another and they all absolutely loved it and money triumphs over all sometimes; the Seychelles are very, very, very happy to have the money.

The Seychelles seemed to be a complete dictatorship. Well, I can't say that. Can you call a country a dictatorship if by and large the government really represents the people and represents what they want? You know, I'd rather that they had a choice in who they could vote for. They didn't really on the Seychelles. There was an opposition; for a long time there wasn't but they brought a chap back who'd actually been overthrown but he was an unmitigated jerk and I would have voted for the man who was de facto dictator myself rather than vote for him.

Q: What about, before we move to the Seychelles and Comoros and the problems you had there, what about the tourist business? Because I would have thought that by the late '90s you would have been knee deep in tourists.

GEISEL: Well we were knee deep in tourists; they just weren't Americans. If you think about it, it's too damn far to go. There are no direct flights; it takes 17, 18 hours to get there from the east coast of the United States, if you're lucky, if you have good connections, usually more. It's a wonderful place to have a holiday. Look, you have ditch diggers that speak French and English and so does everybody else. It's a very charming place; it's a very beautiful place. You have the rich and famous from Europe, you have all sorts of European movie stars who are there just walking around without being bothered. But you know, can you really justify spending so much time to go there when you can go to the Caribbean and have a somewhat similar experience? Not as nice.

Mauritius is very much high end tourism but I think that's the main reason the word has gotten out, that's the main reason that I was followed by two political appointees and probably many more to come.

Q: Okay. The Comoros and the Seychelles.

GEISEL: Okay, let's do Comoros quickly. Comoros had had something like 42 coups. They were led by the same guy, Bob Denard,

Q: This is South African professional soldier?

GEISEL: No, no, no. That was Seychelles, you're quite right, Michael Hoare, Mad Mike Hoare. No, Bob Denard was very French.

Q: You can fill it.

GEISEL: He was actually married to a Comoran and he kept coming in and overthrowing the government when he didn't like it and, even when he did like it, they all listened to him. Actually the last time it didn't work for him and that's when he ended up in a French jail instead of just being taken off the island by his French pals when it didn't work out.

Comoros was hopelessly corrupt. What had happened is that Comoros, when it sought independence, the French weren't that anxious to let them go but they had an election. Three of the four islands voted for independence; the fourth island, which was Christian, voted overwhelmingly to stay French and the French had hung on to it although they were very sorry that they hung on to it because it was the same basket case as the rest. The people really didn't have much to do, there was no economy, must and they were almost all on the dole. I remember one of the French ambassadors in Mauritius had said to me the instant that the people on Mayotte, Mayotte was the island that had stayed with France, he said the instant they vote 50.000009% for independence, they are gone. I never could figure out my status with respect to Mayotte, whether the French recognized the fact that I was ambassador to Comoros including Mayotte not; I never pushed it because I was sure they would say no, this is a part of France and I never did anything other than transit that island.

While I was there the Comorons had their own civil war, if you will, where the island of Anjouan, which was the second largest island and probably the island with some of the brightest people was trying to secede from the Federal Republic of Comoros and there was a bit of bloodshed, not much because this was history repeating itself over and over and over again. My predecessor had said to me you have to visit them twice; once when you present your credentials and once when you leave and try to stay away from it other than that. He had gotten our Peace Corps out of there because it was costing us a fortune to evacuate the Peace Corps every time there was a coup although the Peace Corps were very beloved as you would expect and were never really in any danger at all. When I

went there the people would all say when are the Peace Corps coming back, when are the Peace Corps coming back?

I had to go there three times because of course we had that hijacking in the middle. There was nothing you could do there. The French dominated the place, such as it was, because they were the only people who gave them some money and I believe they ran their central bank. We had no interest that I could think of. A few missionaries, a few American missionaries there, very nice people, very decent, really fine people but no tourism as far as I knew. Whenever I would go there, those three times, it was just a matter of their hands were always out. You never knew how they were going to vote in the UN because actually they never paid rent on any of the places they occupied in New York, which had the Office of Foreign Missions rather busy all the time. So that was Comoros.

Q: Well during the time you were there, both in Mauritius and Comoros, did the-

GEISEL: We would occasionally make demarches by fax. There again you never knew who was in power to say anything and whether there was anyone at the UN to even vote.

Q: How about did the manner of Islamic terrorism or Islamic-

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: -come up while you were there?

GEISEL: Yes. That's a good reason to have an embassy in the area. One of the terrorists who blew up our embassy in Nairobi, one of their leaders was a Comoron and the FBI was hot on his trail and fortunately we had at that particular moment some good contacts. One guy who I had met there and who I was schmoozing up on the phone and who I'd taken care of when he got to Mauritius, had the ear of the president, you know, it's like what happens in the Foreign Service; I guessed right in choosing a contact. So the FBI were positively welcomed but this terrorist was just two steps ahead. He's an Al Quaeda guy, he's well known but the FBI never caught up with him on Comoros. The other thing I did is at the same time that the FBI team was coming out in Nairobi, the husband of my secretary was a retired French paratrooper who knew people on the island; he had served on that island, well he and his wife had been the charge's secretary on that island when we had an embassy there and he knew everyone and so I sent him to work with the FBI. So just as with the hijacking it's amazing what a U.S. embassy in the area can do to help get important business done, and that was really the only important business we had with them.

Q: The Seychelles?

GEISEL: Well Seychelles, as I started to say, a tropical island paradise, very suspicious of us and in my opinion wrongly suspicious of us. They thought that in some way we had put Mad Mike Hoare, who tried to launch a coup in 1982 that we were in some way involved with it and we weren't. As a result, after this 1982 attempted coup, they had

really gone far left and they brought in North Korean and East German security people. By the time I got there this was all wearing off and they decided they didn't really want to pay these people and they were pretty independent, out for whatever they could get from whoever they could get it. The rhetoric was all socialist but the reality was that they grabbed a buck wherever they could get a buck. They were very good on protecting the environment and they had a lot of wonderful environment to protect. One thing we were able to help them with was Coast Guard advisors who helped them in protecting the environment; we even gave them some small boats that were surplus which they used to try and track down the people who were pirating their fish. We gave the head of their Coast Guard, who was a sharp guy and who the former US Embassy in Seychelles had discovered, trips and training in the States. I actually closed that embassy when I got there. I was ambassador with an embassy for a day in Seychelles when I first got there; I closed it, which was very sad, of course. But we had picked key people in the military and we'd done well in winning their favor, giving them things that were useful without spending a lot of money.

Q: Well now, on Mauritius particularly but also did Madagascar or Tanzania, any of those places surrounding play any particular role?

GEISEL: No. And it's interesting that you ask, especially about Madagascar because that has changed, I think. There was Madagascar, which should have totally dominated the Western Indian Ocean area but it didn't because it was so poor and hopeless and helpless in my day and Mauritius dominated the Mauritius-Madagascar relationship with Franco-Mauritians investing in textiles in Madagascar without a lot of success.

Q: Well South Africa was first break through its changes.

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Did that have any repercussions of good, bad or otherwise?

GEISEL: Now, you have to remember that during the days of apartheid Mauritius had quietly accepted investment. The original tourism investments were made by South Africans, by Sol Kerzner, who's the guy who built this Atlantis in the Bahamas, he's a huge hotel mogul, and he started his empire really in Mauritius. For a long time South African tourists were very important to Mauritius and they quietly did a lot of business with the apartheid regime. Once freedom came to South Africa, the relationship, the economic relationship, which everyone knew about, could of course come out in the open and there was significant South African investment. There's this wonderful Indian connection as well because you have lots of Indians, especially in Natal, which is the closest to Mauritius, and when Mauritius was in bad days a whole bunch of-

Q: You don't mean Nepal, you mean-

GEISEL: Natal. When times were rough in Mauritius a bunch of Franco-Mauritian sugar planters had gone to South Africa, to Natal, and done very, very well in the sugar business and funnily enough many of them were my father-in-law's patients.

Q: Now, coming to an extremely important period in American diplomacy, how did you as an American ambassador deal with the Monica Lewinsky impeachment of President Clinton?

GEISEL: Oh.

Q: I mean, was this a topic or was this something people were good enough not to talk about?

GEISEL: They were pretty much good enough not to talk about it. You know, President Clinton was very popular in Mauritius; he was a very charming guy. I suppose so much of it was, as you would expect of French oriented and maybe even Indian oriented people was they didn't know what they big deal was all about. You know? A girl friend, a mistress. I lucked out because they didn't really care, just thinking about it now.

Q: I know I interviewed, I think it was Mary Huhtala I think was our ambassador to Malaysia at this time and saying here she was a woman having you know, cigar jokes and all this.

GEISEL: Oh yes, yes. No, I was really spared it. Friends of mine might mention it jokingly but it wasn't- no one cared.

Q: Did the African Bureau lean- you were a part of Africa?

GEISEL: Yes.

Q: Did the African Bureau lean on you at all?

GEISEL: Oh, we were ignored. The embassy was in good shape. I remember a couple times when I was at a conference Susan Rice went out of her way to talk to me because she said oh, your embassy is the only embassy we never have any problems with. It was, look, I had an easy country. There wasn't a problem. In Seychelles, things just got better and better. The Seychelles Government, when I got there, was furious that we were closing the tracking station. Now the reason that we closed the tracking station was A, we didn't need it too much anymore, although it was useful. B, the Seychelles Government had gambled and lost. They wanted to raise the rent I think by six times and it wasn't very much even with the increase but the Air Force said forget it and Seychelles said leave and the Air Force said okay, we will. By the time the Seychelles realized that the Air Force really meant it and they said no, no, no, no we'll cut our demands, the Air Force said no, we're out of here and of course the Air Force just left everything in place, including these huge, ugly communications towers, which fortunately General Zinni set up a training exercise with the Corps of Engineers to take them down.

Q: General Zinni being the chief of CENTCOM.

GEISEL: Exactly. He had a great fondness for Seychelles. He tried, I think about five times while I was there, to stop in Seychelles for a day or two on the way to the Middle East, which was a nice way to get over jet lag and stay in a lovely island and the Seychelles kept on treating him with more and more distinction. I should say that when the Air Force closed down and was disposing of this and that they were lucky that they had an ambassador, or the State Department was lucky that it had an ambassador who had an admin background because I snatched up an awful lot of very slightly used right hand drive vehicles which the Air Force was just going to leave in place and we distributed them I think all over the east coast of Africa where they needed right hand drive cars. I kept one for our Embassy as well.

Q: Well then you left there in '99?

GEISEL: I left in '99.

Q: Whither?

GEISEL: Well I had been ticked out, I had time in class and I knew that I would have just one more year left and I told whoever the person was from personnel who called me up that that was fine and if they could find something useful for me to do I would be glad to do it. And, lo and behold, I had a bunch of telephone calls from people who wanted me for my last year and it was suggested that the best thing I could do would be a senior negotiator for the Bureau of Political Military Affairs and I did that. I negotiated base agreements for the Department of Defense or led teams that did this and we did it in Korea or in many cases it was just getting money. Actually they had had, my predecessor had been ambassador, if you remember it, ambassador for what they called burden sharing and I think he may have even been a deputy assistant secretary. You know the way the bureaucracy works, they decided there were too many deputy assistant secretaries and no, they weren't going to go to the Senate and get a confirmation, so they were looking for someone who had that ambassador title and they picked me up. I thoroughly enjoyed myself, went many places around the world, Japan, Korea, Korea twice, I think, Greece a bunch of times, where we ended up with an agreement for the little Navy bases, Naval airbases we still had on the islands. It was a lovely last year and I was more or less of a figurehead but a very necessary figurehead and you know, PM and DOD would tell me what they wanted me to say and how I should say it.

Q: Did you find any sort of difference in perspective between the State Department and the Department of Defense on those things or not?

GEISEL: No. It was fine. The only issues we would have, it was just what you would expect- where the DOD really wanted to pack everything they could into a Status of Forces agreement, giving our people every type of privilege and State would say, wait a

minute, this is pushing it a bit too hard and DOD would invariably listen. I think where I did my real negotiating in many ways was with DOD.

Q: Well this is I've often heard on these things.

GEISEL: But my DOD friends were really great; I had no serious issues at all. I also got involved, PM asked me to do something that wasn't DOD related; I got involved in Slovenia with an organization that did mine cleaning, mine clearing in the former Yugoslavia and I went out to Slovenia for a couple negotiations there and that was fun, worth just a mention. The different perspective from the way we looked at it as opposed to the Europeans. The Europeans were really much more of a jobs for the boys type arrangement and what they wanted were contracts with mine clearing organizations that would basically pay them by the month, by the week or whatever it was and we were completely different. We said no, we'll pay by how many acres of mines they clear and the Europeans were very indignant about that. I just loved being stubborn since we were giving the most money, we won. That was fun. I never had expected to have such a rewarding last tour. Look, it wasn't as much fun as being an ambassador but it was close to it.

Q: Well then you retired in 2000?

GEISEL: Correct.

Q: What have you been doing since?

GEISEL: Well, for three months I was trying to figure out what to do with my life and then in January 2001 Pat Kennedy, the assistant secretary for administration called up and asked me would I be the acting deputy assistant secretary for logistics management until the White House could figure out who it wanted in that job or that it would give it to the career service. And I said, how long, Pat? And he said oh, three, four weeks. It lasted eight months. So I was very, very involved in running one of the larger organizations in the Department after my retirement.

Q: What does that job _____?

GEISEL: Well, logistics management is all of the Department's contracting. It's all of the pouching except, literally, for the diplomatic couriers themselves. It's all of the Department's shipping arrangements, whether for government property or for household effects. It's peoples' transportation arrangements. It's a big organization.

Q: Oh yes.

GEISEL: I mean, literally thousands of people. And Pat, I suppose, wanted me because he knew I knew what I was doing and I had utterly no ambition to try to convince anyone to do anything or to give me a contract or to keep me on or anything else. And finally we got a new assistant secretary, Bill Eaton, and he picked Frank Coulter, a superb officer, to

be the permanent DAS and we arranged as fast as possible a transfer of power and I went off to retirement, I thought, except that didn't last very long because then I was asked to first be the deputy and then head the team of negotiators that were charged with negotiating an agreement with the Peoples Republic of China that would enable them to build an embassy in Washington and us to build a new embassy in Beijing. And I was told oh, that should last about three months and it lasted two years, with six trips to China, mind you, and at least two times that we thought it was finished and we weren't going to get anywhere and again, as much negotiating with our other agencies, especially those agencies that were concerned with security and intelligence. That was a blast. It was arguably one of the most important things I ever did in my entire career even though the career was over and I was a has- been.

Q: Talk a bit about the Chinese as negotiators.

GEISEL: They are tough as nails. They actually have for their government people a negotiating school and I sure wish we had something like that. No one is allowed to go on their teams until they've been to the negotiating school. So the name of the game is, first of all, no one talks except the leader of the delegation. But with us, the leader of the delegation sometimes can hardly get a word in edgewise what with all the different agencies. I'm exaggerating but I have reason to exaggerate because this is a bad point where we were weak. The name of the game is to see who is the real head of the Chinese delegation or if the real head is even on the delegation because the other thing you know is the delegation is empowered to do nothing except listen and attempt to get you to give concessions. The Chinese specialty is sitting under the tree just patiently waiting for fruit to drop.

Q: Well now, by this time, we're talking about 2001, 2, 3, had we learned to keep our fruit from dropping?

GEISEL: Oh, pretty much so. It was, oh, we didn't give them anything. We didn't give them anything that we didn't want to give them, I should say. We had our plan and we stuck to it. The issues began and ended with security and the Chinese, and we went back and forth with concrete batch plants and zoning and all sorts of stuff but it all, it was going to rise and fall on whether we could be certain that we could control our shipments every moment from the time they left the United States, or they left where they were pouched until they got to Beijing and to our controlled site. We would get all sorts of deals and everything fell into place except the security elements and that's when we had to leave. Our ambassador in China gave us great advice.

Q: What's his name?

GEISEL: Randt, Clark Randt is his name. He has lived in Hong Kong for many years, he's an attorney and he speaks Mandarin Chinese. He said to us, you'll never get this through unless you walk away from the table at least once and go home. He was right. We actually had to walk away from the table twice, go home once, and then the Chinese called us back The Chinese foreign ministry did not have control, it was their security

people. The Chinese foreign ministry, I think, wanted to build a new embassy which they needed as badly as we needed. A new one.

Q: Yes, they're stuffed in that.

GEISEL: Oh, it was an apartment building on Connecticut Avenue.

Q: Yes.

GEISEL: I've been to the new site; they're going to build a hell of a great embassy. And so are we.

Q: Well did you have the feeling that the Chinese security people really wanted to compromise, in other words, to stick their stuff in or was this just a matter of-

GEISEL: They didn't want to have a new embassy. They didn't give a damn about their people in Washington. You know, our current, soon to be former, thank God, embassy had so many areas where it could be compromised, even though we tried and tried and tried, it was such a God awful mess and I think they were just as happy as pigs in manure with us in that place. Finally, I think what may have pushed them over was that President Bush the elder was to have dinner with the prime minister, no, with the president of China and Ambassador Randt got him to mention this to the president of China and I think that may have been what pushed the deal through.

Q: Just looking at this, I'm sure…

GEISEL: This is a serious business and occasionally various elements in an embassy like Beijing or Moscow have got very sensitive stuff and I'm sure the same is true for the Russians and Chinese here in Washington.

Q: Okay. Well then, have you been involved in anything else?

GEISEL: Well, a fellow named Dick Shinnick who was executive director of the executive secretariat of the Department and was Grant Greene's executive assistant and I come in to the department, we're helping out consular affairs right now and we give a bit advice and counsel, we insist on being employees as opposed to contractors even though we'd make far more money if we were contractors because we want to be on the Department's side of the table, but we try not to come in more than two days a week and six hours a day. I don't know how this will work. You know, when it's this hot and miserable I'd like to say, I've had a wonderful career, won't it ever end? But the fact is, I had a wonderful career and I'm very, very happy to continue to contribute if my contributions are useful but I would also be very happy if it just all ended and I could be retired because I have a saying, which is retirement is much too wonderful to be left to the elderly and infirm. I'd rather be busy doing the things I want to do than the things I have to do.

Q: Well I think we'll leave it at that.

GEISEL: Absolutely.

Q: Great.

End of interview